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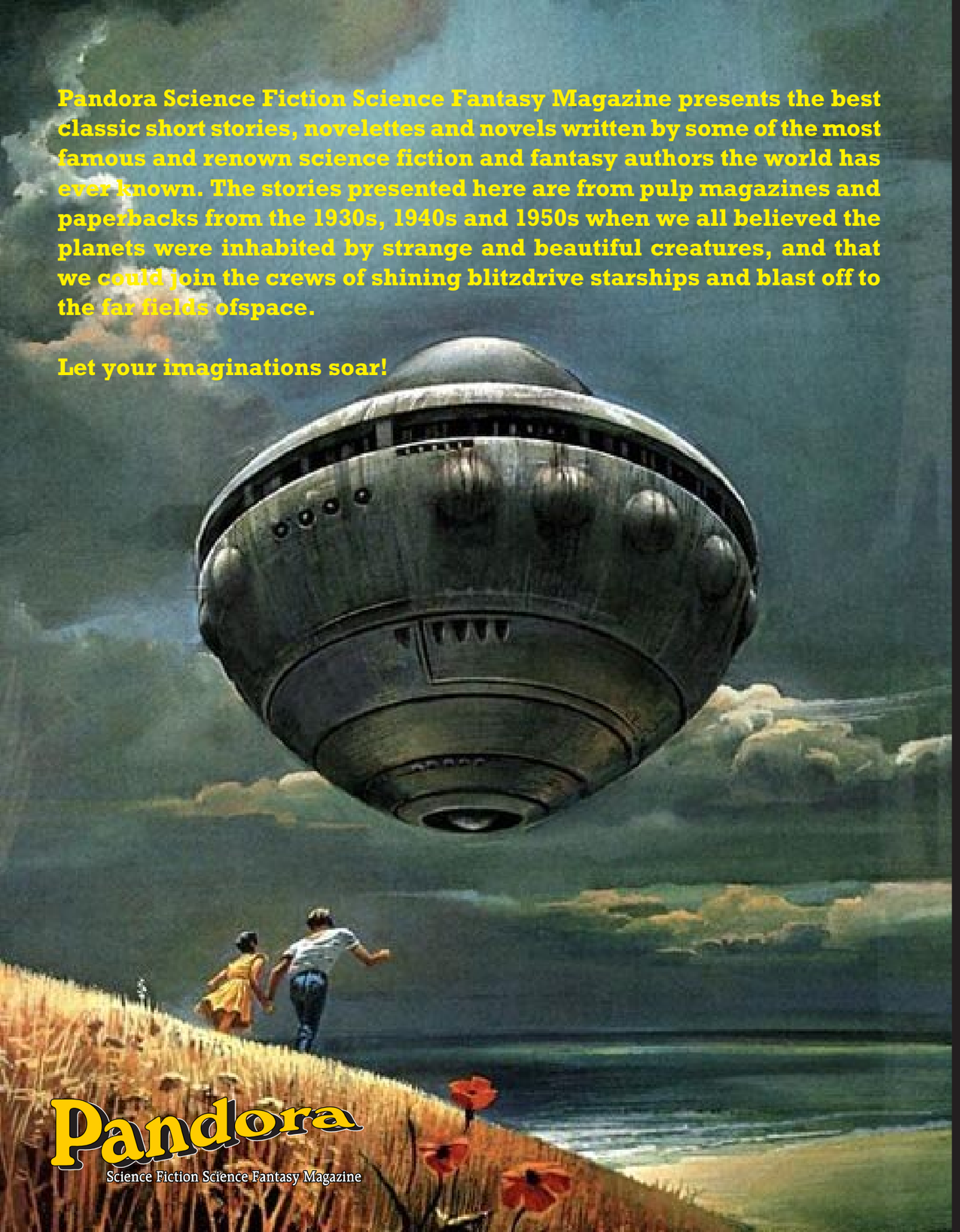

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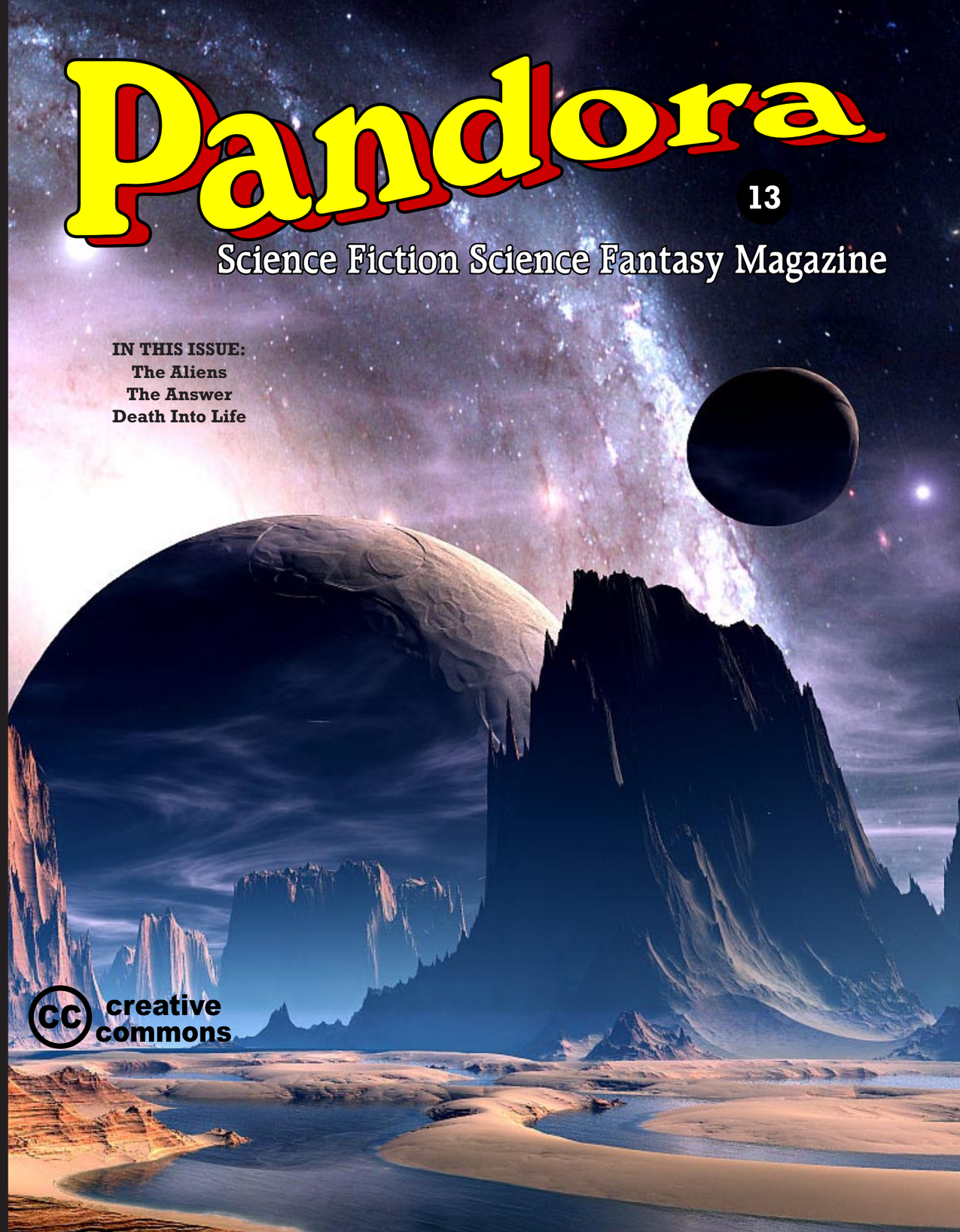

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THE ALIENS

The human race was expanding through the galaxy ... and so, they knew, were the Aliens. When two expanding empires meet ... war is inevitable. Or is it ...?

At 04 hours 10 minutes, ship time, the Niccola was well inside the Theta Gisol solar system. She had previously secured excellent evidence that this was not the home of the Plumie civilization. There was no tuned radiation. There was no evidence of interplanetary travel—rockets would be more than obvious, and a magnetronic drive had a highly characteristic radiation-pattern—so the real purpose of the Niccola's voyage would not be accomplished here. She wouldn't find out where Plumies came from.

There might, though, be one or more of those singular, conical, hollow-topped cairns sheltering silicon-bronze plates, which constituted the evidence that Plumies existed. The Niccola went sunward toward the inner planets to see. Such cairns had been found on conspicuous landmarks on oxygen-type planets over a range of some twelve hundred light-years. By the vegetation about them, some were a century old. On the same evidence, others had been erected only months or weeks or even days before a human Space Survey ship arrived to discover them. And the situation was unpromising. It wasn't likely that the galaxy was big enough to hold two races of rational beings capable of space travel. Back on ancient Earth, a planet had been too small to hold two races with tools and fire. Historically, that problem was settled when Homo sapiens exterminated Homo neanderthalis. It appeared that the same situation had arisen in space. There were humans, and there were Plumies. Both had interstellar ships. To humans, the fact was alarming. The need for knowledge, and the danger that Plumies might know more first, and thereby be able to exterminate humanity, was appalling.

Therefore the Niccola. She drove on sunward. She had left one frozen outer planet far behind. She had crossed the orbits of three others. The last of these was a gas giant with innumerable moonlets revolving about it. It was now some thirty millions of miles back and twenty to one side. The sun, ahead, flared and flamed

in emptiness against that expanse of tinted stars.

Jon Baird worked steadily in the Niccola's radar room. He was one of those who hoped that the Plumies would not prove to be the natural enemies of mankind. Now, it looked like this ship wouldn't find out in this solar system. There were plenty of other ships on the hunt. From here on, it looked like routine to the next unvisited family of planets. But meanwhile he worked. Opposite him, Diane Holt worked as steadily, her dark head bent intently over a radar graph in formation. The immediate job was the completion of a map of the meteor swarms following cometary orbits about this sun. They interlaced emptiness with hazards to navigation, and nobody would try to drive through a solar system without such a map.

Elsewhere in the ship, everything was normal. The engine room was a place of stillness and peace, save for the almost inaudible hum of the drive, running at half a million Gauss flux-density. The skipper did whatever skippers do when they are invisible to their subordinates. The weapons officer, Taine, thought appropriate thoughts. In the navigation room the second officer conscientiously glanced at each separate instrument at least once in each five minutes, and then carefully surveyed all the screens showing space outside the ship. The stewards disposed of the debris of the last meal, and began to get ready for the next. In the crew's quarters, those off duty read or worked at scrimshaw, or simply and contentedly loafed.

Diane handed over the transparent radar graph, to be fitted into the three-dimensional map in the making.

"There's a lump of stuff here," she said interestedly. "It could be the comet that once followed this orbit, now so old it's lost all its gases and isn't a comet any longer."

At this instant, which was 04 hours 25 minutes ship time, the alarm-bell rang. It clanged stridently over Baird's head, repeater-gongs sounded all through the ship, and there was a scurrying and a closing of doors. The alarm gong could mean only one thing. It made one's breath come faster or one's hair stand on end, according to temperament.

The skipper's face appeared on the direct-line screen from the navigation room.

"Plumies?" he demanded harshly. "Mr. Baird! Plumies?"

Baird's hands were already flipping switches and plugging the radar room apparatus into a new setup.

"There's a contact, sir," he said curtly. "No. There was a contact. It's broken now. Something detected us. We picked up a radar pulse. One."

The word "one" meant much. A radar system that could get adequate information from a single pulse was not the work of amateurs. It was the product of a

very highly developed technology. Setting all equipment to full-globular scanning, Baird felt a certain crawling sensation at the back of his neck. He'd been mapping within a narrow range above and below the line of this system's ecliptic. A lot could have happened outside the area he'd had under long-distance scanning.

But seconds passed. They seemed like years. The all-globe scanning covered every direction out from the Niccola. Nothing appeared which had not been reported before. The gas-giant planet far behind, and the only inner one on this side of the sun, would return their pulses only after minutes. Meanwhile the radars reported very faintfully, but they only repeated previous reports.

"No new object within half a million miles," said Baird, after a suitable interval. Presently he added: "Nothing new within three-quarter million miles." Then: "Nothing new within a million miles ..."

The skipper said bitingly:

"Then you'd better check on objects that are not new!" He turned aside, and his voice came more faintly as he spoke into another microphone. "Mr. Taine! Arm all rockets and have your tube crews stand by in combat readiness! Engine room! Prepare drive for emergency maneuvers! Damage-control parties, put on pressure suits and take combat posts with equipment!" His voice rose again in volume. " Mr. Baird! How about observed objects?"

Diane murmured. Baird said briefly:

"Only one suspicious object, sir—and that shouldn't be suspicious. We are sending an information-beam at something we'd classed as a burned-out comet. Pulse going out now, sir."

Diane had the distant-information transmitter aimed at what she'd said might be a dead comet. Baird pressed the button. An extraordinary complex of information-seeking frequencies and forms sprang into being and leaped across emptiness. There were microwaves of strictly standard amplitude, for measurement-standards. There were frequencies of other values, which would be selectively absorbed by this material and that. There were laterally and circularly polarized beams. When they bounced back, they would bring a surprising amount of information.

They returned. They did bring back news. The thing that had registered as a larger lump in a meteor-swarm was not a meteor at all. It returned four different frequencies with a relative-intensity pattern which said that they'd been reflected by bronze—probably silicon bronze. The polarized beams came back depolarized, of course, but with phase-changes which said the reflector had a rounded, regular form. There was a smooth hull of silicon bronze out yonder. There was other data.

"It will be a Plumie ship, sir," said Baird very steadily. "At a guess, they

picked up our mapping beam and shot a single pulse at us to find out who and what we were. For another guess, by now they've picked up and analyzed our information-beam and know what we've found out about them."

The skipper scowled.

"How many of them?" he demanded. "Have we run into a fleet?"

"I'll check, sir," said Baird. "We picked up no tuned radiation from outer space, sir, but it could be that they picked us up when we came out of overdrive and stopped all their transmissions until they had us in a trap."

"Find out how many there are!" barked the skipper. "Make it quick! Report additional data instantly!"

His screen clicked off. Diane, more than a little pale, worked swiftly to plug the radar-room equipment into a highly specialized pattern. The Niccola was very well equipped, radar-wise. She'd been a type G8 Survey ship, and on her last stay in port she'd been rebuilt especially to hunt for and make contact with Plumies. Since the discovery of their existence, that was the most urgent business of the Space Survey. It might well be the most important business of the human race—on which its survival or destruction would depend. Other remodeled ships had gone out before the Niccola, and others would follow until the problem was solved. Meanwhile the Niccola's twenty-four rocket tubes and stepped-up drive and computer-type radar system equipped her for Plumie-hunting as well as any human ship could be. Still, if she'd been lured deep into the home system of the Plumies, the prospects were not good.

The new setup began its operation, instantly the last contact closed. The three-dimensional map served as a matrix to control it. The information-beam projector swung and flung out its bundle of oscillations. It swung and flashed, and swung and flashed. It had to examine every relatively nearby object for a constitution of silicon bronze and a rounded shape. The nearest objects had to be examined first. Speed was essential. But three-dimensional scanning takes time, even at some hundreds of pulses per minute.

Nevertheless, the information came in. No other silicon-bronze object within a quarter-million miles. Within half a million. A million. A million and a half. Two million ...

Baird called the navigation room.

"Looks like a single Plumie ship, sir," he reported. "At least there's one ship which is nearest by a very long way."

"Hah!" grunted the skipper. "Then we'll pay him a visit. Keep an open line, Mr. Baird!" His voice changed. "Mr. Taine! Report here at once to plan tactics!"

Baird shook his head, to himself. The Niccola's orders were to make contact without discovery, if such a thing were possible. The ideal would be a Plumie ship or the Plumie civilization itself, located and subject to complete and overwhelm-

ing envelopment by human ships—before the Plumies knew they'd been discovered. And this would be the human ideal because humans have always had to consider that a stranger might be hostile, until he'd proven otherwise.

Such a viewpoint would not be optimism, but caution. Yet caution was necessary. It was because the Survey brass felt the need to prepare for every unfavorable eventuality that Taine had been chosen as weapons officer of the Niccola. His choice had been deliberate, because he was a xenophobe. He had been a problem personality all his life. He had a seemingly congenital fear and hatred of strangers—which in mild cases is common enough, but Taine could not be cured without a complete breakdown of personality. He could not serve on a ship with a multiracial crew, because he was invincibly suspicious of and hostile to all but his own small breed. Yet he seemed ideal for weapons officer on the Niccola, provided he never commanded the ship. Because if the Plumies were hostile, a well-adjusted, normal man would never think as much like them as a Taine. He was capable of the kind of thinking Plumies might practice, if they were xenophobes themselves.

But to Baird, so extreme a precaution as a known psychopathic condition in an officer was less than wholly justified. It was by no means certain that the Plumies would instinctively be hostile. Suspicious, yes. Cautious, certainly. But the only fact known about the Plumie civilization came from the cairns and silicon-bronze inscribed tablets they'd left on oxygen-type worlds over a twelve-hundred-light-year range in space, and the only thing to be deduced about the Plumies themselves came from the decorative, formalized symbols like feathery plumes which were found on all their bronze tablets. The name "Plumies" came from that symbol.

Now, though, Taine was called to the navigation room to confer on tactics. The Niccola swerved and drove toward the object Baird identified as a Plumie ship. This was at 05 hours 10 minutes ship time. The human ship had a definite velocity sunward, of course. The Plumie ship had been concealed by the meteor swarm of a totally unknown comet. It was an excellent way to avoid observation. On the other hand, the Niccola had been mapping, which was bound to attract attention. Now each ship knew of the other's existence. Since the Niccola had been detected, she had to carry out orders and attempt a contact to gather information.

Baird verified that the Niccola's course was exact for interception at her full-drive speed. He said in a flat voice:

"I wonder how the Plumies will interpret this change of course? They know we're aware they're not a meteorite. But charging at them without even trying to communicate could look ominous. We could be stupid, or too arrogant to think of anything but a fight." He pressed the skipper's call and said evenly: "Sir, I request permission to attempt to communicate with the Plumie ship. We're ordered

to try to make friends if we know we've been spotted."

Taine had evidently just reached the navigation room. His voice snapped from the speaker:

"I advise against that, sir! No use letting them guess our level of technology!"

Baird said coldly:

"They've a good idea already. We beamed them for data."

There was silence, with only the very faint humming sound which was natural in the ship in motion. It would be deadly to the nerves if there were absolute silence. The skipper grumbled:

"Requests and advice! Dammit! Mr. Baird, you might wait for orders! But I was about to ask you to try to make contact through signals. Do so."

His speaker clicked off. Baird said:

"It's in our laps. Diane. And yet we have to follow orders. Send the first roll."

Diane had a tape threaded into a transmitter. It began to unroll through a pickup head. She put on headphones. The tape began to transmit toward the Plumie. Back at base it had been reasoned that a pattern of clickings, plainly artificial and plainly stating facts known to both races, would be the most reasonable way to attempt to open contact. The tape sent a series of cardinal numbers—one to five. Then an addition table, from one plus one to five plus five. Then a multiplication table up to five times five. It was not startlingly intellectual information to be sent out in tiny clicks ranging up and down the radio spectrum. But it was orders.

Baird sat with compressed lips. Diane listened for a repetition of any of the transmitted signals, sent back by the Plumie. The speakers about the radar room murmured the orders given through all the ship. Radar had to be informed of all orders and activity, so it could check their results outside the ship. So Baird heard the orders for the engine room to be sealed up and the duty-force to get into pressure suits, in case the Niccola fought and was hulled. Damage-control parties reported themselves on post, in suits, with equipment ready. Then Taine's voice snapped: "Rocket crews, arm even-numbered rockets with chemical explosive warheads. Leave odd-numbered rockets armed with atomics. Report back!"

Diane strained her ears for possible re-transmission of the Niccola's signals, which would indicate the Plumie's willingness to try conversation. But she suddenly raised her hand and pointed to the radar-graph instrument. It repeated the positioning of dots which were stray meteoric matter in the space between worlds in this system. What had been a spot—the Plumie ship—was now a line of dots. Baird pressed the button.

"Radar reporting!" he said curtly. "The Plumie ship is heading for us. I'll have relative velocity in ten seconds."

He heard the skipper swear. Ten seconds later the Doppler measurement became possible. It said the Plumie plunged toward the Niccola at miles per second. In half a minute it was tens of miles per second. There was no re-transmission of signals. The Plumie ship had found itself discovered. Apparently it considered itself attacked. It flung itself into a headlong dash for the Niccola.

Time passed—interminable time. The sun flared and flamed and writhed in emptiness. The great gas-giant planet rolled through space in splendid state, its moonlets spinning gracefully about its bulk. The oxygen-atmosphere planet to sunward was visible only as a crescent, but the mottlings on its lighted part changed as it revolved—seas and islands and continents receiving the sunlight as it turned. Meteor swarms, so dense in appearance on a radar screen, yet so tenuous in reality, floated in their appointed orbits with a seeming vast leisure.

The feel of slowness was actually the result of distance. Men have always acted upon things close by. Battles have always been fought within eye-range, anyhow. But it was actually 06 hours 35 minutes ship time before the two spacecraft sighted each other—more than two hours after they plunged toward a rendezvous.

The Plumie ship was a bright golden dot, at first. It decelerated swiftly. In minutes it was a rounded, end-on disk. Then it swerved lightly and presented an elliptical broadside to the Niccola. The Niccola was in full deceleration too, by then. The two ships came very nearly to a stop with relation to each other when they were hardly twenty miles apart—which meant great daring on both sides.

Baird heard the skipper grumbling:

"Damned cocky!" He roared suddenly: "Mr. Baird! How've you made out in communicating with them?"

"Not at all, sir," said Baird grimly. "They don't reply."

He knew from Diane's expression that there was no sound in the headphones except the frying noise all main-sequence stars give out, and the infrequent thumping noises that come from gas-giant planets' lower atmospheres, and the Jansky-radiation hiss which comes from everywhere.

The skipper swore. The Plumie ship lay broadside to, less than a score of miles away. It shone in the sunlight. It acted with extraordinary confidence. It was as if it dared the Niccola to open fire.

Taine's voice came out of a speaker, harsh and angry:

"Even-numbered tubes prepare to fire on command."

Nothing happened. The two ships floated sunward together, neither approaching nor retreating. But with every second, the need for action of some sort

increased.

"Mr. Baird!" barked the skipper. "This is ridiculous! There must be some way to communicate! We can't sit here glaring at each other forever! Raise them! Get some sort of acknowledgment!"

"I'm trying," said Baird bitterly, "according to orders!"

But he disagreed with those orders. It was official theory that arithmetic values, repeated in proper order, would be the way to open conversation. The assumption was that any rational creature would grasp the idea that orderly signals were rational attempts to open communication.

But it had occurred to Baird that a Plumie might not see this point. Perception of order is not necessarily perception of information—in fact, quite the contrary. A message is a disturbance of order. A microphone does not transmit a message when it sends an unvarying tone. A message has to be unpredictable or it conveys no message. Orderly clicks, even if overheard, might seem to Plumies the result of methodically operating machinery. A race capable of interstellar flight was not likely to be interested or thrilled by exercises a human child goes through in kindergarten. They simply wouldn't seem meaningful at all.

But before he could ask permission to attempt to make talk in a more sophisticated fashion, voices exclaimed all over the ship. They came blurringly to the loud-speakers. "Look at that!" "What's he do—" "Spinning like—" From every place where there was a vision-plate on the Niccola, men watched the Plumie ship and babbled.

This was at 06 hours 50 minutes ship time.

The elliptical golden object darted into swift and eccentric motion. Lacking an object of known size for comparison, there was no scale. The golden ship might have been the size of an autumn leaf, and in fact its maneuvers suggested the heedless tumblings and scurrying of falling foliage. It fluttered in swift turns and somersaults and spinnings. There were weavings like the purposeful feints of boxers not yet come to battle. There were indescribably graceful swoops and loops and curving dashes like some preposterous dance in emptiness.

Taine's voice crashed out of a speaker:

"All even-number rockets," he barked. "Fire!"

The skipper roared a countermand, but too late. The crunching, grunting sound of rockets leaving their launching tubes came before his first syllable was complete. Then there was silence while the skipper gathered breath for a masterpiece of profanity. But Taine snapped:

"That dance was a sneak-up! The Plumie came four miles nearer while we watched!"

Baird jerked his eyes from watching the Plumie. He looked at the master

radar. It was faintly blurred with the fading lines of past gyrations, but the golden ship was much nearer the Niccola than it had been.

"Radar reporting," said Baird sickishly. "Mr. Taine is correct. The Plumie ship did approach us while it danced."

Taine's voice snarled:

"Reload even numbers with chemical-explosive war heads. Then remove atomics from odd numbers and replace with chemicals. The range is too short for atomics."

Baird felt curiously divided in his own mind. He disliked Taine very much. Taine was arrogant and suspicious and intolerant even on the Niccola. But Taine had been right twice, now. The Plumie ship had crept closer by pure trickery. And it was right to remove atomic war heads from the rockets. They had a pure-blast radius of ten miles. To destroy the Plumie ship within twice that would endanger the Niccola —and leave nothing of the Plumie to examine afterward.

The Plumie ship must have seen the rocket flares, but it continued to dance, coming nearer and ever nearer in seemingly heedless and purposeless plungings and spinnings in star-speckled space. But suddenly there were racing, rushing trails of swirling vapor. Half the Niccola's port broadside plunged toward the golden ship. The fraction of a second later, the starboard half-dozen chemical-explosive rockets swung furiously around the ship's hull and streaked after their brothers. They moved in utterly silent, straight-lined, ravening ferocity toward their target. Baird thought irrelevantly of the vapor trails of an atmosphere-liner in the planet's upper air.

The ruled-line straightness of the first six rockets' course abruptly broke. One of them veered crazily out of control. It shifted to an almost right-angled course. A second swung wildly to the left. A third and fourth and fifth—The sixth of the first line of rockets made a great, sweeping turn and came hurtling back toward the Niccola. It was like a nightmare. Lunatic, erratic lines of sunlit vapor eeled before the background of all the stars in creation.

Then the second half-dozen rockets broke ranks, as insanely and irremediably as the first.

Taine's voice screamed out of a speaker, hysterical with fury:

"Detonate! Detonate! They've taken over the rockets and are throwing 'em back at us! Detonate all rockets!"

The heavens seemed streaked and laced with lines of expanding smoke. But now one plunging line erupted at its tip. A swelling globe of smoke marked its end. Another blew up. And another—

The Niccola's rockets faithfully blew themselves to bits on command from the Niccola's own weapons control. There was nothing else to be done with them. They'd been taken over in flight. They'd been turned and headed back toward

their source. They'd have blasted the Niccola to bits but for their premature explosions.

There was a peculiar, stunned hush all through the Niccola. The only sound that came out of any speaker in the radar room was Taine's voice, high-pitched and raging, mouthing unspeakable hatred of the Plumies, whom no human being had yet seen.

Baird sat tense in the frustrated and desperate composure of the man who can only be of use while he is sitting still and keeping his head. The vision screen was now a blur of writhing mist, lighted by the sun and torn at by emptiness. There was luminosity where the ships had encountered each other. It was sunshine upon thin smoke. It was like the insanely enlarging head of a newborn comet, whose tail would be formed presently by light-pressure. The Plumie ship was almost invisible behind the unsubstantial stuff.

But Baird regarded his radar screens. Microwaves penetrated the mist of rapidly ionizing gases.

"Radar to navigation!" he said sharply. "The Plumie ship is still approaching, dancing as before!"

The skipper said with enormous calm:

"Any other Plumie ships, Mr. Baird?"

Diane interposed.

"No sign anywhere. I've been watching. This seems to be the only ship within radar range."

"We've time to settle with it, then," said the skipper. " Mr. Taine, the Plumie ship is still approaching."

Baird found himself hating the Plumies. It was not only that humankind was showing up rather badly, at the moment. It was that the Plumie ship had refused contact and forced a fight. It was that if the Niccola were destroyed the Plumie would carry news of the existence of humanity and of the tactics which worked to defeat them. The Plumies could prepare an irresistible fleet. Humanity could be doomed.

But he overheard himself saying bitterly:

"I wish I'd known this was coming, Diane. I ... wouldn't have resolved to be strictly official, only, until we got back to base."

Her eyes widened. She looked startled. Then she softened.

"If ... you mean that ... I wish so too."

"It looks like they've got us," he admitted unhappily. "If they can take our rockets away from us—" Then his voice stopped. He said, "Hold everything!" and pressed the navigation-room button. He snapped: "Radar to navigation. It appears to take the Plumies several seconds to take over a rocket. They have to aim some-

thing—a pressor or tractor beam, most likely—and pick off each rocket separately. Nearly forty seconds was consumed in taking over all twelve of our rockets. At shorter range, with less time available, a rocket might get through!"

The skipper swore briefly. Then:

"Mr. Taine! When the Plumies are near enough, our rockets may strike before they can be taken over! You follow?"

Baird heard Taine's shrill-voiced acknowledgment—in the form of practically chattered orders to his rocket-tube crews. Baird listened, checking the orders against what the situation was as the radars saw it. Taine's voice was almost unhuman; so filled with frantic rage that it cracked as he spoke. But the problem at hand was the fulfillment of all his psychopathic urges. He commanded the starboard-side rocket-battery to await special orders. Meanwhile the port-side battery would fire two rockets on widely divergent courses, curving to join at the Plumie ship. They'd be seized. They were to be detonated and another port-side rocket fired instantly, followed by a second hidden in the rocket-trail the first would leave behind. Then the starboard side—

"I'm afraid Taine's our only chance," said Baird reluctantly. "If he wins, we'll have time to ... talk as people do who like each other. If it doesn't work—"

Diane said quietly:

"Anyhow ... I'm glad you ... wanted me to know. I ... wanted you to know, too."

She smiled at him, yearningly.

There was the crump-crump of two rockets going out together. Then the radar told what happened. The Plumie ship was no more than six miles away, dancing somehow deftly in the light of a yellow sun, with all the cosmos spread out as shining pin points of colored light behind it. The radar reported the dash and the death of the two rockets, after their struggle with invisible things that gripped them. They died when they headed reluctantly back to the Niccola—and detonated two miles from their parent ship. The skipper's voice came:

"Mr. Taine! After your next salvo I shall head for the Plumie at full drive, to cut down the distance and the time they have to work in. Be ready!"

The rocket tubes went crump-crump again, with a fifth of a second interval. The radar showed two tiny specks speeding through space toward the weaving, shifting speck which was the Plumie.

Outside, in emptiness, there was a filmy haze. It was the rocket-fumes and explosive gases spreading with incredible speed. It was thin as gossamer. The Plumie ship undoubtedly spotted the rockets, but it did not try to turn them. It somehow seized them and deflected them, and darted past them toward the Niccola.

"They see the trick," said Diane, dry-throated. "If they can get in close enough, they can turn it against us!"

There were noises inside the Niccola, now. Taine fairly howled an order. There were yells of defiance and excitement. There were more of those inadequate noises as rockets went out—every tube on the starboard side emptied itself in a series of savage grunts—and the Niccola's magnetronic drive roared at full flux density.

The two ships were less than a mile apart when the Niccola let go her full double broadside of missiles. And then it seemed that the Plumie ship was doomed. There were simply too many rockets to be seized and handled before at least one struck. But there was a new condition. The Plumie ship weaved and dodged its way through them. The new condition was that the rockets were just beginning their run. They had not achieved the terrific velocity they would accumulate in ten miles of no-gravity. They were new-launched; logy: clumsy: not the streaking, flashing death-and-destruction they would become with thirty more seconds of acceleration.

So the Plumie ship dodged them with a skill and daring past belief. With an incredible agility it got inside them, nearer to the Niccola than they. And then it hurled itself at the human ship as if bent upon a suicidal crash which would destroy both ships together. But Baird, in the radar room, and the skipper in navigation, knew that it would plunge brilliantly past at the last instant—

And then they knew that it would not. Because, very suddenly and very abruptly, there was something the matter with the Plumie ship. The life went out of it. It ceased to accelerate or decelerate. It ceased to steer. It began to turn slowly on an axis somewhere amidships. Its nose swung to one side, with no change in the direction of its motion. It floated onward. It was broadside to its line of travel. It continued to turn. It hurtled stern-first toward the Niccola. It did not swerve. It did not dance. It was a lifeless hulk: a derelict in space.

And it would hit the Niccola amidships with no possible result but destruction for both vessels.

The Niccola's skipper bellowed orders, as if shouting would somehow give them more effect. The magnetronic drive roared. He'd demanded a miracle of it, and he almost got one. The drive strained its thrust-members. It hopelessly overloaded its coils. The Niccola's cobalt-steel hull became more than saturated with the drive-field, and it leaped madly upon an evasion course—

And it very nearly got away. It was swinging clear when the Plumie ship drifted within fathoms. It was turning aside when the Plumie ship was within yards. And it was almost safe when the golden hull of the Plumie—shadowed now by the Niccola itself—barely scraped a side-keel.

There was a touch, seemingly deliberate and gentle. But the Niccola shud-

dered horribly. Then the vision screens flared from such a light as might herald the crack of doom. There was a brightness greater than the brilliance of the sun. And then there was a wrenching, heaving shock. Then there was blackness. Baird was flung across the radar room, and Diane cried out, and he careened against a wall and heard glass shatter. He called:

"Diane!"

He clutched crazily at anything, and called her name again. The Niccola's internal gravity was cut off, and his head spun, and he heard collision-doors closing everywhere, but before they closed completely he heard the rasping sound of giant arcs leaping in the engine room. Then there was silence.

"Diane!" cried Baird fiercely. "Diane!"

"I'm ... here," she panted. "I'm dizzy, but I ... think I'm all right—"

The battery-powered emergency light came on. It was faint, but he saw her clinging to a bank of instruments where she'd been thrown by the collision. He moved to go to her, and found himself floating in midair. But he drifted to a side wall and worked his way to her.

She clung to him, shivering.

"I ... think," she said unsteadily, "that we're going to die. Aren't we?"

"We'll see," he told her. "Hold on to me."

Guided by the emergency light, he scrambled to the bank of communicator-buttons. What had been the floor was now a side wall. He climbed it and thumbed the navigation-room switch.

"Radar room reporting," he said curtly. "Power out, gravity off, no reports from outside from power failure. No great physical damage."

He began to hear other voices. There had never been an actual space-collision in the memory of man, but reports came crisply, and the cut-in speakers in the radar room repeated them. Ship-gravity was out all over the ship. Emergency lights were functioning, and were all the lights there were. There was a slight, unexplained gravity-drift toward what had been the ship's port side. But damage-control reported no loss of pressure in the Niccola's inner hull, though four areas between inner and outer hulls had lost air pressure to space.

"Mr. Baird," rasped the skipper. "We're blind! Forget everything else and give us eyes to see with!"

"We'll try battery power to the vision plates," Baird told Diane. "No full resolution, but better than nothing—"

They worked together, feverishly. They were dizzy. Something close to nausea came upon them from pure giddiness. What had been the floor was now a wall, and they had to climb to reach the instruments that had been on a wall and now were on the ceiling. But their weight was ounces only. Baird said abruptly:

"I know what's the matter! We're spinning! The whole ship's spinning! That's why we're giddy and why we have even a trace of weight. Centrifugal force! Ready for the current?"

There was a tiny click, and the battery light dimmed. But a vision screen lighted faintly. The stars it showed were moving specks of light. The sun passed deliberately across the screen. Baird switched to other outside scanners. There was power for only one screen at a time. But he saw the starkly impossible. He pressed the navigation-room button.

"Radar room reporting," he said urgently. "The Plumie ship is fast to us, in contact with our hull! Both ships are spinning together!" He was trying yet other scanners as he spoke, and now he said: "Got it! There are no lines connecting us to the Plumie, but it looks ... yes! That flash when the ships came together was a flash-over of high potential. We're welded to them along twenty feet of our hull!"

The skipper:

"Damnation! Any sign of intention to board us?"

"Not yet, sir—"

Taine burst in, his voice high-pitched and thick with hatred:

"Damage-control parties attention! Arm yourselves and assemble at starboard air lock! Rocket crews get into suits and prepare to board this Plumie—"

"Countermand!" bellowed the skipper from the speaker beside Baird's ear. "Those orders are canceled! Dammit, if we were successfully boarded we'd blow ourselves to bits! Those are our orders! D'you think the Plumies will let their ship be taken? And wouldn't we blow up with them? Mr. Taine, you will take no offensive action without specific orders! Defensive action is another matter. Mr. Baird! I consider this welding business pure accident. No one would be mad enough to plan it. You watch the Plumies and keep me informed!"

His voice ceased. And Baird had again the frustrating duty of remaining still and keeping his head while other men engaged in physical activity. He helped Diane to a chair—which was fastened to the floor-which-was-now-a-wall—and she wedged herself fast and began a review of what each of the outside scanners reported. Baird called for more batteries. Power for the radar and visions was more important than anything else, just then. If there were more Plumie ships ...

Electricians half-floated, half-dragged extra batteries to the radar room. Baird hooked them in. The universe outside the ship again appeared filled with brilliantly colored dots of light which were stars. More satisfying, the globe-scanners again reported no new objects anywhere. Nothing new within a quarter million miles. A half-million. Later Baird reported:

"Radars report no strange objects within a million miles of the Niccola, sir."

"Except the ship we're welded to! But you are doing very well. However,

microphones say there is movement inside the Plumie."

Diane beckoned for Baird's attention to a screen, which Baird had examined before. Now he stiffened and motioned for her to report.

"We've a scanner, sir," said Diane, "which faces what looks like a port in the Plumie ship. There's a figure at the port. I can't make out details, but it is making motions, facing us."

"Give me the picture!" snapped the skipper.

Diane obeyed. It was the merest flip of a switch. Then her eyes went back to the spherical-sweep scanners which reported the bearing and distance of every solid object within their range. She set up two instruments which would measure the angle, bearing, and distance of the two planets now on this side of the sun—the gas-giant and the oxygen-world to sunward. Their orbital speeds and distances were known. The position, course, and speed of the Niccola could be computed from any two observations on them.

Diane had returned to the utterly necessary routine of the radar room which was the nerve-center of the ship, gathering all information needed for navigation in space. The fact that there had been a collision, that the Niccola's engines were melted to unlovely scrap, that the Plumie ship was now welded irremovably to a side-keel, and that a Plumie was signaling to humans while both ships went spinning through space toward an unknown destination—these things did not affect the obligations of the radar room.

Baird got other images of the Plumie ship into sharp focus. So near, the scanners required adjustment for precision.

"Take a look at this!" he said wryly.

She looked. The view was of the Plumie as welded fast to the Niccola. The welding was itself an extraordinary result of the Plumie's battle-tactics. Tractor and pressor beams were known to men, of course, but human beings used them only under very special conditions. Their operation involved the building-up of terrific static charges. Unless a tractor-beam generator could be grounded to the object it was to pull, it tended to emit lightning-bolts at unpredictable intervals and in entirely random directions. So men didn't use them. Obviously, the Plumies did.

They'd handled the Niccola's rockets with beams which charged the golden ship to billions of volts. And when the silicon-bronze Plumie ship touched the cobalt-steel Niccola—why—that charge had to be shared. It must have been the most spectacular of all artificial electric flames. Part of the Niccola's hull was vaporized, and undoubtedly part of the Plumie. But the unvaporized surfaces were molten and in contact—and they stuck.

For a good twenty feet the two ships were united by the most perfect of vacuum-welds. The wholly dissimilar hulls formed a space-catamaran, with a sort

of valley between their bulks. Spinning deliberately, as the united ships did, sometimes the sun shone brightly into that valley, and sometimes it was filled with the blackness of the pit.

While Diane looked, a round door revolved in the side of the Plumie ship. As Diane caught her breath, Baird reported crisply. At his first words Taine burst into raging commands for men to follow him through the Niccola's air lock and fight a boarding party of Plumies in empty space. The skipper very savagely ordered him to be quiet.

"Only one figure has come out," reported Baird. The skipper watched on a vision plate, but Baird reported so all the Niccola's company would know. "It's small—less than five feet ... I'll see better in a moment." Sunlight smote down into the valley between the ships. "It's wearing a pressure suit. It seems to be the same material as the ship. It walks on two legs, as we do ... It has two arms, or something very similar ... The helmet of the suit is very high ... It looks like the armor knights used to fight in ... It's making its way to our air lock ... It does not use magnetic-soled shoes. It's holding onto lines threaded along the other ship's hull ..."

The skipper said curtly:

"Mr. Baird! I hadn't noticed the absence of magnetic shoes. You seem to have an eye for important items. Report to the air lock in person. Leave Lieutenant Holt to keep an eye on outside objects. Quickly, Mr. Baird!"

Baird laid his hand on Diane's shoulder. She smiled at him.

"I'll watch!" she promised.

He went out of the radar room, walking on what had been a side wall. The giddiness and dizziness of continued rotation was growing less, now. He was getting used to it. But the Niccola seemed strange indeed, with the standard up and down and Earth-gravity replaced by a vertical which was all askew and a weight of ounces instead of a hundred and seventy pounds.

He reached the air lock just as the skipper arrived. There were others there—armed and in pressure suits. The skipper glared about him.

"I am in command here," he said very grimly indeed. "Mr. Taine has a special function, but I am in command! We and the creatures on the Plumie ship are in a very serious fix. One of them apparently means to come on board. There will be no hostility, no sneering, no threatening gestures! This is a parley! You will be careful. But you will not be trigger-happy!"

He glared around again, just as a metallic rapping came upon the Niccola's air-lock door. The skipper nodded:

"Let him in the lock, Mr. Baird."

Baird obeyed. The humming of the unlocking-system sounded. There were clankings. The outer air lock dosed. There was a faint whistling as air went in. The

skipper nodded again.

Baird opened the inner door. It was 08 hours 10 minutes ship time.

The Plumie stepped confidently out into the topsy-turvy corridors of the Niccola. He was about the size of a ten-year-old human boy, and features which were definitely not grotesque showed through the clear plastic of his helmet. His pressure suit was, engineering-wise, a very clean job. His whole appearance was prepossessing. When he spoke, very clear and quite high sounds—soprano sounds—came from a small speaker-unit at his shoulder.

"For us to talk," said the skipper heavily, "is pure nonsense. But I take it you've something to say."

The Plumie gazed about with an air of lively curiosity. Then he drew out a flat pad with a white surface and sketched swiftly. He offered it to the Niccola's skipper.

"We want this on record," he growled, staring about.

Diane's voice said capably from a speaker somewhere nearby:

"Sir, there's a scanner for inspection of objects brought aboard. Hold the plate flat and I'll have a photograph—right!"

The skipper said curtly to the Plumie:

"You've drawn our two ships linked as they are. What have you to say about it?"

He handed back the plate. The Plumie pressed a stud and it was blank again. He sketched and offered it once more.

"Hm-m-m," said the skipper. "You can't use your drive while we're glued together, eh? Well?"

The Plumie reached up and added lines to the drawing.

"So!" rumbled the skipper, inspecting the additions. "You say it's up to us to use our drive for both ships." He growled approvingly: "You consider there's a truce. You must, because we're both in the same fix, and not a nice one, either. True enough! We can't fight each other without committing suicide, now. But we haven't any drive left! We're a derelict! How am I going to say that—if I decide to?"

Baird could see the lines on the plate, from the angle at which the skipper held it. He said:

"Sir, we've been mapping, up in the radar room. Those last lines are map-co-ordinates—a separate sketch, sir. I think he's saying that the two ships, together, are on a falling course toward the sun. That we have to do something or both vessels will fall into it. We should be able to check this, sir."

"Hah!" growled the skipper. "That's all we need! Absolutely all we need! To come here, get into a crazy right, have our drive melt to scrap, get crazily

welded to a Plumie ship, and then for both of us to fry together! We don't need anything more than that!"

Diane's voice came on the speaker:

"Sir, the last radar fixes on the planets in range give us a course directly toward the sun. I'll repeat the observations."

The skipper growled. Taine thrust himself forward. He snarled:

"Why doesn't this Plumie take off its helmet? It lands on oxygen planets! Does it think it's too good to breathe our air?"

Baird caught the Plumie's eye. He made a gesture suggesting the removal of the space helmet. The Plumie gestured, in return, to a tiny vent in the suit. He opened something and gas whistled out. He cut it off. The question of why he did not open or remove his helmet was answered. The atmosphere he breathed would not do men any good, nor would theirs do him any good, either. Taine said suspiciously:

"How do we know he's breathing the stuff he let out then? This creature isn't human! It's got no right to attack humans! Now it's trying to trick us!" His voice changed to a snarl. "We'd better wring its neck! Teach its kind a lesson—"

The skipper roared at him.

"Be quiet! Our ship is a wreck! We have to consider the facts! We and these Plumies are in a fix together, and we have to get out of it before we start to teach anybody anything!" He glared at Taine. Then he said heavily: "Mr. Baird, you seem to notice things. Take this Plumie over the ship. Show him our drive melted down, so he'll realize we can't possibly tow his ship into an orbit. He knows that we're armed, and that we can't handle our war heads at this range! So we can't fool each other. We might as well be frank. But you will take full note of his reactions, Mr. Baird!"

Baird advanced, and the skipper made a gesture. The Plumie regarded Baird with interested eyes. And Baird led the way for a tour of the Niccola. It was confusing even to him, with right hand converted to up and left hand to down, and sidewise now almost vertical. On the way the Plumie made more clear, flutelike sounds, and more gestures. Baird answered.

"Our gravity pull was that way," he explained, "and things fell so fast."

He grasped a handrail and demonstrated the speed with which things fell in normal ship-gravity. He used a pocket communicator for the falling weight. It was singularly easy to say some things, even highly technical ones, because they'd be what the Plumie would want to know. But quite commonplace things would be very difficulty to convey.

Diane's voice came out of the communicator.

"There are no novelties outside," she said quietly. "It looks like this is the

only Plumie ship anywhere around. It could have been exploring, like us. Maybe it was looking for the people who put up Space-Survey markers."

"Maybe," agreed Baird, using the communicator. "Is that stuff about falling into the sun correct?"

"It seems so," said Diane composedly. "I'm checking again. So far, the best course I can get means we graze the sun's photosphere in fourteen days six hours, allowing for acceleration by the sun's gravity."

"And you and I," said Baird wryly, "have been acting as professional associates only, when—"

"Don't say it!" said Diane shakily. "It's terrible!"

He put the communicator back in his pocket. The Plumie had watched him. He had a peculiarly gallant air, this small figure in golden space armor with its high-crested helmet.

They reached the engine room. And there was the giant drive shaft of the Niccola, once wrapped with yard-thick coils which could induce an incredible density of magnetic flux in the metal. Even the return magnetic field, through the ship's cobalt-steel hull, was many times higher than saturation. Now the coils were sagging: mostly melted. There were places where re-solidified metal smoked noisesomely against nonmetallic floor or wall-covering. Engineers labored doggedly in the trivial gravity to clean up the mess.

"It's past repair," said Baird, to the ship's first engineer.

"It's junk," said that individual dourly. "Give us six months and a place to set up a wire-drawing mill and an insulator synthesizer, and we could rebuild it. But nothing less will be any good."

The Plumie stared at the drive. He examined the shaft from every angle. He inspected the melted, and partly-melted, and merely burned-out sections of the drive coils. He was plainly unable to understand in any fashion the principle of the magnetronic drive. Baird was tempted to try to explain, because there was surely no secret about a ship drive, but he could imagine no diagrams or gestures which would convey the theory of what happened in cobalt-steel when it was magnetized beyond one hundred thousand Gauss' flux-density. And without that theory one simply couldn't explain a magnetronic drive.

They left the engine room. They visited the rocket batteries. The generator room was burned out, like the drive, by the inconceivable lightning bolt which had passed between the ships on contact. The Plumie was again puzzled. Baird made it clear that the generator-room supplied electric current for the ship's normal lighting-system and services. The Plumie could grasp that idea. They examined the crew's quarters, and the mess room, and the Plumie walked confidently among the members of the human crew, who a little while since had tried so painstakingly to destroy his vessel. He made a good impression.

"These little guys," said a crewman to Baird, admiringly, "they got something. They can handle a ship! I bet they could almost make that ship of theirs play checkers!"

"Close to it," agreed Baird. He realized something. He pulled the communicator from his pocket. "Diane! Contact the skipper. He wanted observations. Here's one. This Plumie acts like soldiers used to act in ancient days—when they wore armor. And we have the same reaction! They will fight like the devil, but during a truce they'll be friendly, admiring each other as scrappers, but ready to fight as hard as ever when the truce is over. We have the same reaction! Tell the skipper I've an idea that it's a part of their civilization—maybe it's a necessary part of any civilization! Tell him I guess that there may be necessarily parallel evolution of attitudes, among rational races, as there are parallel evolutions of eyes and legs and wings and fins among all animals everywhere! If I'm right, somebody from this ship will be invited to tour the Plumie! It's only a guess, but tell him!"

"Immediately," said Diane.

The Plumie followed gallantly as Baird made a steep climb up what once was the floor of a corridor. Then Taine stepped out before them. His eyes burned.

"Giving him a clear picture, eh?" he rasped. "Letting him spy out everything?"

Baird pressed the communicator call for the radar room and said coldly:

"I'm obeying orders. Look, Taine! You were picked for your job because you were a xenophobe. It helps in your proper functioning. But this Plumie is here under a flag of truce—"

"Flag of truce!" snarled Taine. "It's vermin! It's not human! I'll—"

"If you move one inch nearer him," said Baird gently, "just one inch—"

The skipper's voice bellowed through the general call speakers all over the ship:

"Mr. Taine! You will go to your quarters, under arrest! Mr. Baird, burn him down if he hesitates!"

Then there was a rushing, and scrambling figures appeared and were all about. They were members of the Niccola's crew, sent by the skipper. They regarded the Plumie with detachment, but Taine with a wary expectancy. Taine turned purple with fury. He shouted. He raged. He called Baird and the others Plumie-lovers and vermin-worshipers. He shouted foulnesses at them. But he did not attack.

When, still shouting, he went away, Baird said apologetically to the Plumie:

"He's a xenophobe. He has a pathological hatred of strangers—even of strangeness. We have him on board because—"

Then he stopped. The Plumie wouldn't understand, of course. But his eyes took on a curious look. It was almost as if, looking at Baird, they twinkled.

Baird took him back to the skipper.

"He's got the picture, sir," he reported.

The Plumie pulled out his sketch plate. He drew on it. He offered it. The skipper said heavily:

"You guessed right, Mr. Baird. He suggests that someone from this ship go on board the Plumie vessel. He's drawn two pressure-suited figures going in their air lock. One's larger than the other. Will you go?"

"Naturally!" said Baird. Then he added thoughtfully: "But I'd better carry a portable scanner, sir. It should work perfectly well through a bronze hull, sir."

The skipper nodded and began to sketch a diagram which would amount to an acceptance of the Plumie's invitation.

This was at 07 hours 40 minutes ship time. Outside the sedately rotating metal hulls—the one a polished blue-silver and the other a glittering golden bronze—the cosmos continued to be as always. The haze from explosive fumes and rocket-fuel was, perhaps, a little thinner. The brighter stars shone through it. The gas-giant planet outward from the sun was a perceptible disk instead of a diffuse glow. The oxygen-planet to sunward showed again as a lighted crescent.

Presently Baird, in a human spacesuit, accompanied the Plumie into the Niccola's air lock and out to emptiness. His magnetic-soled shoes clung to the Niccola's cobalt-steel skin. Fastened to his shoulder there was a tiny scanner and microphone, which would relay everything he saw and heard back to the radar room and to Diane.

She watched tensely as he went inside the Plumie ship. Other screens relayed the image and his voice to other places on the Niccola.

He was gone a long time. From the beginning, of course, there were surprises. When the Plumie escort removed his helmet, on his own ship, the reason for the helmet's high crest was apparent. He had a high crest of what looked remarkably like feathers—and it was not artificial. It grew there. The reason for conventionalized plumes on bronze survey plates was clear. It was exactly like the reason for human features or figures as decorative additions to the inscriptions on Space Survey marker plates. Even the Plumie's hands had odd crestlets which stood out when he bent his fingers. The other Plumies were no less graceful and no less colorful. They had equally clear soprano voices. They were equally miniature and so devoid of apparent menace.

But there was also technical surprises. Baird was taken immediately to the Plumie ship's engine room, and Diane heard the sharp intake of breath with which he appeared to recognize its working principle. There were Plumie engineers working feverishly at it, attempting to discover something to repair. But they found

nothing. The Plumie drive simply would not work.

They took Baird through the ship's entire fabric. And their purpose, when it became clear, was startling. The Plumie ship had no rocket tubes. It had no beam-projectors except small-sized objects which were—which must be—their projectors of tractor and pressor beams. They were elaborately grounded to the ship's substance. But they were not originally designed for ultra-heavy service. They hadn't and couldn't have the enormous capacity Baird had expected. He was astounded.

When he returned to the Niccola, he went instantly to the radar room to make sure that pictures taken through his scanner had turned out well. And there was Diane.

But the skipper's voice boomed at him from the wall.

"Mr. Baird! What have you to add to the information you sent back?"

"Three items, sir," said Baird. He drew a deep breath. "For the first, sir, the Plumie ship is unarmed. They've tractor and pressor beams for handling material. They probably use them to build their cairns. But they weren't meant for weapons. The Plumies, sir, hadn't a thing to fight with when they drove for us after we detected them."

The skipper blinked hard.

"Are you sure of that, Mr. Baird?"

"Yes, sir," said Baird uncomfortably. "The Plumie ship is an exploring ship—a survey ship, sir. You saw their mapping equipment. But when they spotted us, and we spotted them—they bluffed! When we fired rockets at them, they turned them back with tractor and pressor beams. They drove for us, sir, to try to destroy us with our own bombs, because they didn't have any of their own."

The skipper's mouth opened and closed.

"Another item, sir," said Baird more uncomfortably still. "They don't use iron or steel. Every metal object I saw was either a bronze or a light metal. I suspect some of their equipment's made of potassium, and I'm fairly sure they use sodium in the place of aluminum. Their atmosphere's quite different from ours—obviously! They'd use bronze for their ship's hull because they can venture into an oxygen atmosphere in a bronze ship. A sodium-hulled ship would be lighter, but it would burn in oxygen. Where there was moisture—"

The skipper blinked.

"But they couldn't drive in a non-magnetic hull!" he protested. "A ship has to be magnetic to drive!"

"Sir," said Baird, his voice still shaken, "they don't use a magnetronic drive. I once saw a picture of the drive they use, in a stereo on the history of space travel. The principle's very old. We've practically forgotten it. It's a Dirac pusher-drive,

sir. Among us humans, it came right after rockets. The planets of Sol were first reached by ships using Dirac pushers. But—" He paused. "They won't operate in a magnetic field above seventy Gauss, sir. It's a static-charge reaction, sir, and in a magnetic field it simply stops working."

The skipper regarded Baird unwinkingly for a long time.

"I think you are telling me," he said at long last, "that the Plumies' drive would work if they were cut free of the Niccola."

"Yes, sir," said Baird. "Their engineers were opening up the drive-elements and checking them, and then closing them up again. They couldn't seem to find anything wrong. I don't think they know what the trouble is. It's the Niccola's magnetic field. I think it was our field that caused the collision by stopping their drive and killing all their controls when they came close enough."

"Did you tell them?" demanded the skipper.

"There was no easy way to tell them by diagrams, sir."

Taine's voice cut in. It was feverish. It was strident. It was triumphant.

"Sir! The Niccola is effectively a wreck and unrepairable. But the Plumie ship is operable if cut loose. As weapons officer, I intend to take the Plumie ship, let out its air, fill its tanks with our air, start up its drive, and turn it over to you for navigation back to base!"

Baird raged. But he said coldly:

"We're a long way from home, Mr. Taine, and the Dirac pusher drive is slow. If we headed back to base in the Plumie ship with its Dirac pusher, we'd all be dead of old age before we'd gone halfway."

"But unless we take it," raged Taine, "we hit this sun in fourteen days! We don't have to die now! We can land on the oxygen planet up ahead! We've only to kill these vermin and take their ship, and we'll live!"

Diane's voice said dispassionately:

"Report. A Plumie in a pressure suit just came out of their air lock. It's carrying a parcel toward our air lock."

Taine snarled instantly:

"They'll sneak something in the Niccola to blast it, and then cut free and go away!"

The skipper said very grimly:

"Mr. Taine, credit me with minimum brains! There is no way the Plumies can take this ship without an atomic bomb exploding to destroy both ships. You should know it!" Then he snapped: "Air lock area, listen for a knock, and let in the Plumie or the parcel he leaves."

There was silence. Baird said very quietly:

"I doubt they think it possible to cut the ships apart. A torch is no good on

thick silicon bronze. It conducts heat too well! And they don't use steel. They probably haven't a cutting-torch at all."

From the radar room he watched the Plumie place an object in the air lock and withdraw. He watched from a scanner inside the ship as someone brought in what the Plumie had left. An electronics man bustled forward. He looked it over quickly. It was complex, but his examination suddenly seemed satisfying to him. But a grayish vapor developed and he sniffed and wrinkled his nose. He picked up a communicator.

"Sir, they've sent us a power-generator. Some of its parts are going bad in our atmosphere, sir, but this looks to me like a hell of a good idea for a generator! I never saw anything like it, but it's good! You can set it for any voltage and it'll turn out plenty juice!"

"Put it in helium," snapped the skipper. "It won't break down in that! Then see how it serves!"

In the radar room, Baird drew a deep breath. He went carefully to each of the screens and every radar. Diane saw what he was about, and checked with him. They met at the middle of the radar room.

"Everything's checked out," said Baird gravely. "There's nothing else around. There's nothing we can be called on to do before something happens. So ... we can ... act like people."

Diane smiled very faintly.

"Not like people. Just like us." She said wistfully: "Don't you want to tell me something? Something you intended to tell me only after we got back to base?"

He did. He told it to her. And there was also something she had not intended to tell him at all—unless he told her first. She said it now. They felt that such sayings were of the greatest possible importance. They clung together, saying them again. And it seemed wholly monstrous that two people who cared so desperately had wasted so much time acting like professional associates—explorer-ship officers—when things like this were to be said ...

As they talked incoherently, or were even more eloquently silent, the ship's ordinary lights came on. The battery-lamp went on.

"We've got to switch back to ship's circuit," said Baird reluctantly. They separated, and restored the operating circuits to normal. "We've got fourteen days," he added, "and so much time to be on duty, and we've a lost lifetime to live in fourteen days! Diane—"

She flushed vividly. So Baird said very politely into the microphone to the navigation room:

"Sir, Lieutenant Holt and myself would like to speak directly to you in the navigation room. May we?"

"Why not?" growled the skipper. "You've noticed that the Plumie generator is giving the whole ship lights and services?"

"Yes, sir," said Baird. "We'll be there right away."

They heard the skipper's grunt as they hurried through the door. A moment later the ship's normal gravity returned—also through the Plumie generator. Up was up again, and down was down, and the corridors and cabins of the Niccola were brightly illuminated. Had the ship been other than an engineless wreck, falling through a hundred and fifty million miles of emptiness into the flaming photosphere of a sun, everything would have seemed quite normal, including the errand Baird and Diane were upon, and the fact that they held hands self-consciously as they went about it.

They skirted the bulkhead of the main air tank. They headed along the broader corridor which went past the indented inner door of the air lock. They had reached that indentation when Baird saw that the inner air-lock door was closing. He saw a human pressure suit past its edge. He saw the corner of some object that had been put down on the air-lock floor.

Baird shouted, and rushed toward the lock. He seized the inner handle and tried to force open the door again, so that no one inside it could emerge into the emptiness without. He failed. He wrenched frantically at the control of the outer door. It suddenly swung freely. The outer door had been put on manual. It could be and was being opened from inside.

"Tell the skipper," raged Baird. "Taine's taking something out!" He tore open a pressure-suit cupboard in the wall beside the lock door. "He'll make the Plumies think it's a return-gift for the generator!" He eeled into the pressure suit and zipped it up to his neck. "The man's crazy! He thinks we can take their ship and stay alive for a while! Dammit, our air would ruin half their equipment! Tell the skipper to send help!"

He wrenched at the door again, jamming down his helmet with one hand. And this time the control worked. Taine, most probably, had forgotten that the inner control was disengaged only when the manual was actively in use. Diane raced away, panting. Baird swore bitterly at the slowness of the outer door's closing. He was tearing at the inner door long before it could be opened. He flung himself in and dragged it shut, and struck the emergency air-release which bled the air lock into space for speed of operation. He thrust out the outer door and plunged through.

His momentum carried him almost too far. He fell, and only the magnetic soles of his shoes enabled him to check himself. He was in that singular valley between the two ships, where their hulls were impregnably welded fast. Round-hulled Plumie ship, and ganoid-shaped Niccola, they stuck immovably together as if they had been that way since time began. Where the sky appeared above

Baird's head, the stars moved in stately procession across the valley roof.

He heard a metallic rapping through the fabric of his space armor. Then sunlight glittered, and the valley filled with a fierce glare, and a man in a human spacesuit stood on the Niccola's plating, opposite the Plumie air lock. He held a bulky object under his arm. With his other gauntlet he rapped again.

"You fool!" shouted Baird. "Stop that! We couldn't use their ship, anyhow!"

His space phone had turned on with the air supply. Taine's voice snarled:

"We'll try! You keep back! They are not human!"

But Baird ran toward him. The sensation of running upon magnetic-soled shoes was unearthly: it was like trying to run on fly-paper or bird-lime. But in addition there was no gravity here, and no sense of balance, and there was the feeling of perpetual fall.

There could be no science nor any skill in an encounter under such conditions. Baird partly ran and partly staggered and partly skated to where Taine faced him, snarling. He threw himself at the other man—and then the sun vanished behind the bronze ship's hull, and only stars moved visibly in all the universe.

But the sound of his impact was loud in Baird's ears inside the suit. There was a slightly different sound when his armor struck Taine's, and when it struck the heavier metal of the two ships. He fought. But the suits were intended to be defense against greater stresses than human blows could offer. In the darkness, it was like two blindfolded men fighting each other while encased in pillows.

Then the sun returned, floating sedately above the valley, and Baird could see his enemy. He saw, too, that the Plumie air lock was now open and that a small, erect, and somehow jaunty figure in golden space armor stood in the opening and watched gravely as the two men fought.

Taine cursed, panting with hysterical hate. He flung himself at Baird, and Baird toppled because he'd put one foot past the welded boundary between the Niccola's cobalt steel and the Plumie ship's bronze. One foot held to nothing. And that was a ghastly sensation, because if Taine only rugged his other foot free and heaved—why—then Baird would go floating away from the rotating, now-twinned ships, floating farther and farther away forever.

But darkness fell, and he scrambled back to the Niccola's hull as a disorderly parade of stars went by above him. He pantingly waited fresh attack. He felt something—and it was the object Taine had meant to offer as a return present to the Plumies. It was unquestionably explosive, either booby-trapped or timed to explode inside the Plumie ship. Now it rocked gently, gripped by the magnetism of the steel.

The sun appeared again, and Taine was yards away, crawling and fumbling for Baird. Then he saw him, and rose and rushed, and the clankings of his shoesoles were loud. Baird flung himself at Taine in a savage tackle.

He struck Taine's legs a glancing blow, and the cobalt steel held his armor fast, but Taine careened and bounced against the round bronze wall of the Plumie, and bounced again. Then he screamed, because he went floating slowly out to emptiness, his arms and legs jerking spasmodically, while he shrieked ...

The Plumie in the air lock stepped out. He trailed a cord behind him. He leaped briskly toward nothingness.

There came quick darkness once more, and Baird struggled erect despite the adhesiveness of the Niccola's hull. When he was fully upright, sick with horror at what had come about, there was sunlight yet again, and men were coming out of the Niccola's air lock, and the Plumie who'd leaped for space was pulling himself back to his own ship again. He had a loop of the cord twisted around Taine's leg. But Taine screamed and screamed inside his spacesuit.

It was odd that one could recognize the skipper even inside space armor. But Baird felt sick. He saw Taine received, still screaming, and carried into the lock. The skipper growled an infuriated demand for details. His space phone had come on, too, when its air supply began. Baird explained, his teeth chattering.

"Hah!" grunted the skipper. "Taine was a mistake. He shouldn't ever have left ground. When a man's potty in one fashion, there'll be cracks in him all over. What's this?"

The Plumie in the golden armor very soberly offered the skipper the object Taine had meant to introduce into the Plumie's ship. Baird said desperately that he'd fought against it, because he believed it a booby trap to kill the Plumies so men could take their ship and fill it with air and cut it free, and then make a landing somewhere.

"Damned foolishness!" rumbled the skipper. "Their ship'd begin to crumble with our air in it! If it held to a landing—"

Then he considered the object he'd accepted from the Plumie. It could have been a rocket war head, enclosed in some container that would detonate it if opened. Or there might be a timing device. The skipper grunted. He heaved it skyward.

The misshapen object went floating away toward emptiness. Sunlight smote harshly upon it.

"Don't want it back in the Niccola," growled the skipper, "but just to make sure—"

He fumbled a hand weapon out of his belt. He raised it, and it spurted flame—very tiny blue-white sparks, each one indicating a pellet of metal flung away at high velocity.

One of them struck the shining, retreating container. It exploded with a monstrous, soundless, violence. It had been a rocket's war head. There could have been only one reason for it to be introduced into a Plumie ship. Baird ceased to be

shaky. Instead, he was ashamed.

The skipper growled inarticulately. He looked at the Plumie, again standing in the golden ship's air lock.

"We'll go back, Mr. Baird. What you've done won't save our lives, and nobody will ever know you did it. But I think well of you. Come along!"

This was at 11 hours 5 minutes ship time.

A good half hour later the skipper's voice bellowed from the speakers all over the Niccola. His heavy-jowled features stared doggedly out of screens wherever men were on duty or at ease.

"Hear this!" he said forbiddingly. "We have checked our course and speed. We have verified that there is no possible jury-rig for our engines that could get us into any sort of orbit, let alone land us on the only planet in this system with air we could breathe. It is officially certain that in thirteen days nine hours from now, the Niccola will be so close to the sun that her hull will melt down. Which will be no loss to us because we'll be dead then, still going on into the sun to be vaporized with the ship. There is nothing to be done about it. We can do nothing to save our own lives!"

He glared out of each and every one of the screens, wherever there were men to see him.

"But," he rumbled, "the Plumies can get away if we help them. They have no cutting torches. We have. We can cut their ship free. They can repair their drive—but it's most likely that it'll operate perfectly when they're a mile from the Niccola's magnetic field. They can't help us. But we can help them. And sooner or later some Plumie ship is going to encounter some other human ship. If we cut these Plumies loose, they'll report what we did. When they meet other men, they'll be cagey because they'll remember Taine. But they'll know they can make friends, because we did them a favor when we'd nothing to gain by it. I can offer no reward. But I ask for volunteers to go outside and cut the Plumie ship loose, so the Plumies can go home in safety instead of on into the sun with us!"

He glared, and cut off the image.

Diane held tightly to Baird's hand, in the radar room. He said evenly:

"There'll be volunteers. The Plumies are pretty sporting characters—putting up a fight with an unarmed ship, and so on. If there aren't enough other volunteers, the skipper and I will cut them free by ourselves."

Diane said, dry-throated:

"I'll help. So I can be with you. We've got—so little time."

"I'll ask the skipper as soon as the Plumie ship's free."

"Y-yes," said Diane. And she pressed her face against his shoulder, and wept.

This was at 01 hours, 20 minutes ship time. At 03 hours even, there was peculiar activity in the valley between the welded ships. There were men in space armor working cutting-torches where for twenty feet the two ships were solidly attached. Blue-white flames bored savagely into solid metal, and melted copper gave off strangely colored clouds of vapor—which emptiness whisked away to nothing—and molten iron and cobalt made equally lurid clouds of other colors.

There were Plumies in the air lock, watching.

At 03 hours 40 minutes ship time, all the men but one drew back. They went inside the Niccola. Only one man remained, cutting at the last sliver of metal that held the two ships together.

It parted. The Plumie ship swept swiftly away, moved by the centrifugal force of the rotary motion the joined vessels had possessed. It dwindled and dwindled. It was a half mile away. A mile. The last man on the outside of the Niccola's hull thriftily brought his torch to the air lock and came in.

Suddenly, the distant golden hull came to life. It steadied. It ceased to spin, however slowly. It darted ahead. It checked. It swung to the right and left and up and down. It was alive again.

In the radar room, Diane walked into Baird's arms and said shakily:

"Now we ... we have almost fourteen days."

"Wait," he commanded. "When the Plumies understood what we were doing, and why, they drew diagrams. They hadn't thought of cutting free, out in space, without the spinning saws they use to cut bronze with. But they asked for a scanner and a screen. They checked on its use. I want to see—"

He flipped on the screen. And there was instantly a Plumie looking eagerly out of it, for some sign of communication established. There were soprano sounds, and he waved a hand for attention. Then he zestfully held up one diagram after another.

Baird drew a deep breath. A very deep breath. He pressed the navigation-room call. The skipper looked dourly at him.

"Well?" said the skipper forbiddingly.

"Sir," said Baird, very quietly indeed, "the Plumies are talking by diagram over the communicator set we gave them. Their drive works. They're as well off as they ever were. And they've been modifying their tractor beams—stepping them up to higher power."

"What of it?" demanded the skipper, rumbling.

"They believe," said Baird, "that they can handle the Niccola with their beefed-up tractor beams." He wetted his lips. "They're going to tow us to the oxygen planet ahead, sir. They're going to set us down on it They'll help us find the metals we need to build the tools to repair the Niccola, sir. You see the reason-

ing, sir. We turned them loose to improve the chance of friendly contact when another human ship runs into them. They want us to carry back—to be proof that Plumies and men can be friends. It seems that—they like us, sir."

He stopped for a moment. Then he went on reasonably;

"And besides that, it'll be one hell of a fine business proposition. We never bother with hydrogen-methane planets. They've minerals and chemicals we haven't got, but even the stones of a methane-hydrogen planet are ready to combine with the oxygen we need to breathe! We can't carry or keep enough oxygen for real work. The same thing's true with them on an oxygen planet. We can't work on each other's planets, but we can do fine business in each other's minerals and chemicals from those planets. I've got a feeling, sir, that the Plumie cairns are location-notices; markers set up over ore deposits they can find but can't hope to work, yet they claim against the day when their scientists find a way to make them worth owning. I'd be willing to bet, sir, that if we explored hydrogen planets as thoroughly as oxygen ones, we'd find cairns on their-type planets that they haven't colonized yet."

The skipper stared. His mouth dropped open.

"And I think, sir," said Baird, "that until they detected us they thought they were the only intelligent race in the galaxy. They were upset to discover suddenly that they were not, and at first they'd no idea what we'd be like. But I'm guessing now, sir, that they're figuring on what chemicals and ores to start swapping with us." Then he added, "When you think of it, sir, probably the first metal they ever used was aluminum—where our ancestors used copper—and they had a beryllium age next, instead of iron. And right now, sir it's probably as expensive for them to refine iron as it is for us to handle titanium and beryllium and osmium—which are duck soup for them! Our two cultures ought to thrive as long as we're friends, sir. They know it already—and we'll find it out in a hurry!"

The skipper's mouth moved. It closed, and then dropped open again. The search for the Plumies had been made because it looked like they had to be fought. But Baird had just pointed out some extremely commonsense items which changed the situation entirely. And there was evidence that the Plumies saw the situation the new way. The skipper felt such enormous relief that his manner changed. He displayed what was almost effusive cordiality—for the skipper. He cleared his throat.

"Hm-m-m. Hah! Very good, Mr. Baird," he said formidably. " And of course with time and air and metals we can rebuild our drive. For that matter, we could rebuild the Niccola! I'll notify the ship's company, Mr. Baird. Very good!" He moved to use another microphone. Then he checked himself. "Your expression is odd, Mr. Baird. Did you wish to say something more?"

"Y-yes, sir," said Baird. He held Diane's hand fast. "It'll be months before

we get back to port, sir. And it's normally against regulations, but under the circumstances ... would you mind ... as skipper ... marrying Lieutenant Holt and me?"

The skipper snorted. Then he said almost—almost—amiably;

"Hm-m-m. You've both done very well, Mr. Baird. Yes. Come to the navigation room and we'll get it over with. Say—ten minutes from now."

Baird grinned at Diane. Her eyes shone a little.

This was at 04 hours 10 minutes ship time. It was exactly twelve hours since the alarm-bell rang.

THE ANSWER

For a moment, after the screen door snapped and wakened him, Lee Richardson sat breathless and motionless, his eyes still closed, trying desperately to cling to the dream and print it upon his conscious memory before it faded.

"Are you there, Lee?" he heard Alexis Pitov's voice.

"Yes, I'm here. What time is it?" he asked, and then added, "I fell asleep. I was dreaming."

It was all right; he was going to be able to remember. He could still see the slim woman with the graying blonde hair, playing with the little dachshund among the new-fallen leaves on the lawn. He was glad they'd both been in this dream together; these dream-glimpses were all he'd had for the last fifteen years, and they were too precious to lose. He opened his eyes. The Russian was sitting just outside the light from the open door of the bungalow, lighting a cigarette. For a moment, he could see the blocky, high-cheeked face, now pouched and wrinkled, and then the flame went out and there was only the red coal glowing in the darkness. He closed his eyes again, and the dream picture came back to him, the woman catching the little dog and raising her head as though to speak to him.

"Plenty of time, yet." Pitov was speaking German instead of Spanish, as they always did between themselves. "They're still counting down from minus three hours. I just phoned the launching site for a jeep. Eugenio's been there ever since dinner; they say he's running around like a cat looking for a place to have her first litter of kittens."

He chuckled. This would be something new for Eugenio Galvez—for which he could be thankful.

"I hope the generators don't develop any last-second bugs," he said. "We'll only be a mile and a half away, and that'll be too close to fifty kilos of negamatter if the field collapses."

"It'll be all right," Pitov assured him. "The bugs have all been chased out

years ago."

"Not out of those generators in the rocket. They're new." He fumbled in his coat pocket for his pipe and tobacco. "I never thought I'd run another nuclear-bomb test, as long as I lived."

"Lee!" Pitov was shocked. "You mustn't call it that. It isn't that, at all. It's purely a scientific experiment."

"Wasn't that all any of them were? We made lots of experiments like this, back before 1969." The memories of all those other tests, each ending in an Everest-high mushroom column, rose in his mind. And the end result—the United States and the Soviet Union blasted to rubble, a whole hemisphere pushed back into the Dark Ages, a quarter of a billion dead. Including a slim woman with graying blonde hair, and a little red dog, and a girl from Odessa whom Alexis Pitov had been going to marry. "Forgive me, Alexis. I just couldn't help remembering. I suppose it's this shot we're going to make, tonight. It's so much like the other ones, before—" He hesitated slightly. "Before the Auburn Bomb."

There; he'd come out and said it. In all the years they'd worked together at the *Instituto Argentino de Ciencia Fisica*, that had been unmentioned between them. The families of hanged cutthroats avoid mention of ropes and knives. He thumbed the old-fashioned American lighter and held it to his pipe. Across the veranda, in the darkness, he knew that Pitov was looking intently at him.

"You've been thinking about that, lately, haven't you?" the Russian asked, and then, timidly: "Was that what you were dreaming of?"

"Oh, no, thank heaven!"

"I think about it, too, always. I suppose—" He seemed relieved, now that it had been brought out into the open and could be discussed. "You saw it fall, didn't you?"

"That's right. From about thirty miles away. A little closer than we'll be to this shot, tonight. I was in charge of the investigation at Auburn, until we had New York and Washington and Detroit and Mobile and San Francisco to worry about. Then what had happened to Auburn wasn't important, any more. We were trying to get evidence to lay before the United Nations. We kept at it for about twelve hours after the United Nations had ceased to exist."

"I could never understand about that, Lee. I don't know what the truth is; I probably never shall. But I know that my government did not launch that missile. During the first days after yours began coming in, I talked to people who had been in the Kremlin at the time. One had been in the presence of Klyzenko himself when the news of your bombardment arrived. He said that Klyzenko was absolutely stunned. We always believed that your government decided upon a preventive surprise attack, and picked out a town, Auburn, New York, that had been hit by one of our first retaliation missiles, and claimed that it had been hit first."

He shook his head. "Auburn was hit an hour before the first American missile was launched. I know that to be a fact. We could never understand why you launched just that one, and no more until after ours began landing on you; why you threw away the advantage of surprise and priority of attack—"

"Because we didn't do it, Lee!" The Russian's voice trembled with earnestness. "You believe me when I tell you that?"

"Yes, I believe you. After all that happened, and all that you, and I, and the people you worked with, and the people I worked with, and your government, and mine, have been guilty of, it would be a waste of breath for either of us to try to lie to the other about what happened fifteen years ago." He drew slowly on his pipe. "But who launched it, then? It had to be launched by somebody."

"Don't you think I've been tormenting myself with that question for the last fifteen years?" Pitov demanded. "You know, there were people inside the Soviet Union—not many, and they kept themselves well hidden—who were dedicated to the overthrow of the Soviet regime. They, or some of them, might have thought that the devastation of both our countries, and the obliteration of civilization in the Northern Hemisphere, would be a cheap price to pay for ending the rule of the Communist Party."

"Could they have built an ICBM with a thermonuclear warhead in secret?" he asked. "There were also fanatical nationalist groups in Europe, both sides of the Iron Curtain, who might have thought our mutual destruction would be worth the risks involved."

"There was China, and India. If your country and mine wiped each other out, they could go back to the old ways and the old traditions. Or Japan, or the Moslem States. In the end, they all went down along with us, but what criminal ever expects to fall?"

"We have too many suspects, and the trail's too cold, Alexis. That rocket wouldn't have had to have been launched anywhere in the Northern Hemisphere. For instance, our friends here in the Argentine have been doing very well by themselves since *El Coloso del Norte* went down."

And there were the Australians, picking themselves up bargains in real-estate in the East Indies at gun-point, and there were the Boers, trekking north again, in tanks instead of ox-wagons. And Brazil, with a not-too-implausible pretender to the Braganza throne, calling itself the Portuguese Empire and looking eastward. And, to complete the picture, here were Professor Doctor Lee Richardson and Comrade Professor Alexis Petrovitch Pitov, getting ready to test a missile with a matter-annihilation warhead.

No. This thing just wasn't a weapon.

A jeep came around the corner, lighting the dark roadway between the bungalows, its radio on and counting down—Twenty two minutes. *Twenty one fifty*

nine, fifty eight, fifty seven—It came to a stop in front of their bungalow, at exactly Minus Two Hours, Twenty One Minutes, Fifty Four Seconds. The driver called out in Spanish:

"Doctor Richardson; Doctor Pitov! Are you ready?"

"Yes, ready. We're coming."

They both got to their feet, Richardson pulling himself up reluctantly. The older you get, the harder it is to leave a comfortable chair. He settled himself beside his colleague and former enemy, and the jeep started again, rolling between the buildings of the living-quarters area and out onto the long, straight road across the pampas toward the distant blaze of electric lights.

He wondered why he had been thinking so much, lately, about the Auburn Bomb. He'd questioned, at times, indignantly, of course, whether Russia had launched it—but it wasn't until tonight, until he had heard what Pitov had had to say, that he seriously doubted it. Pitov wouldn't lie about it, and Pitov would have been in a position to have known the truth, if the missile had been launched from Russia. Then he stopped thinking about what was water—or blood—a long time over the dam.

The special policeman at the entrance to the launching site reminded them that they were both smoking; when they extinguished, respectively, their cigarette and pipe, he waved the jeep on and went back to his argument with a carload of tourists who wanted to get a good view of the launching.

"There, now, Lee; do you need anything else to convince you that this isn't a weapon project?" Pitov asked.

"No, now that you mention it. I don't. You know, I don't believe I've had to show an identity card the whole time I've been here."

"I don't believe I have an identity card," Pitov said. "Think of that."

The lights blazed everywhere around them, but mostly about the rocket that towered above everything else, so thick that it seemed squat. The gantry-cranes had been hauled away, now, and it stood alone, but it was still wreathed in thick electric cables. They were pouring enough current into that thing to light half the street-lights in Buenos Aires; when the cables were blown free by separation charges at the blastoff, the generators powered by the rocket-engines had better be able to take over, because if the magnetic field collapsed and that fifty-kilo chunk of negative-proton matter came in contact with natural positive-proton matter, an old-fashioned H-bomb would be a firecracker to what would happen. Just one hundred kilos of pure, two-hundred proof MC2.

The driver took them around the rocket, dodging assorted trucks and mobile machinery that were being hurried out of the way. The countdown was just beyond two hours five minutes. The jeep stopped at the edge of a crowd around three more trucks, and Doctor Eugenio Galvez, the director of the Institute, left

the crowd and approached at an awkward half-run as they got down.

"Is everything checked, gentlemen?" he wanted to know.

"It was this afternoon at 1730," Pitov told him. "And nobody's been burning my telephone to report anything different. Are the balloons and the drone planes ready?"

"The Air Force just finished checking; they're ready. Captain Urquiola flew one of the planes over the course and made a guidance-tape; that's been duplicated and all the planes are equipped with copies."

"How's the wind?" Richardson asked.

"Still steady. We won't have any trouble about fallout or with the balloons."

"Then we'd better go back to the bunker and make sure everybody there is on the job."

The loudspeaker was counting down to Two Hours One Minute.

"Could you spare a few minutes to talk to the press?" Eugenio Galvez asked. "And perhaps say a few words for telecast? This last is most important; we can't explain too many times the purpose of this experiment. There is still much hostility, arising from fear that we are testing a nuclear weapon."

The press and telecast services were well represented; there were close to a hundred correspondents, from all over South America, from South Africa and Australia, even one from Ceylon. They had three trucks, with mobile telecast pick-ups, and when they saw who was approaching, they released the two rocketry experts they had been quizzing and pounced on the new victims.

Was there any possibility that negative-proton matter might be used as a weapon?

"Anything can be used as a weapon; you could stab a man to death with that lead pencil you're using," Pitov replied. "But I doubt if negamatter will ever be so used. We're certainly not working on weapons design here. We started, six years ago, with the ability to produce negative protons, reverse-spin neutrons, and positrons, and the theoretical possibility of assembling them into negamatter. We have just gotten a fifty kilogramme mass of nega-iron assembled. In those six years, we had to invent all our techniques, and design all our equipment. If we'd been insane enough to want to build a nuclear weapon, after what we went through up North, we could have done so from memory, and designed a better—which is to say a worse—one from memory in a few days."

"Yes, and building a negamatter bomb for military purposes would be like digging a fifty foot shaft to get a rock to bash somebody's head in, when you could do the job better with the shovel you're digging with," Richardson added. "The time, money, energy and work we put in on this thing would be ample to construct twenty thermonuclear bombs. And that's only a small part of it." He went on to tell

them about the magnetic bottle inside the rocket's warhead, mentioning how much electric current was needed to keep up the magnetic field that insulated the negamatter from contact with posimatter.

"Then what was the purpose of this experiment, Doctor Richardson?"

"Oh, we were just trying to find out a few basic facts about natural structure. Long ago, it was realized that the nucleonic particles—protons, neutrons, mesons and so on—must have structure of their own. Since we started constructing negative-proton matter, we've found out a few things about nucleonic structure. Some rather odd things, including fractions of Planck's constant."

A couple of the correspondents—a man from La Prensa, and an Australian—whistled softly. The others looked blank. Pitov took over:

"You see, gentlemen, most of what we learned, we learned from putting negamatter atoms together. We annihilated a few of them—over there in that little concrete building, we have one of the most massive steel vaults in the world, where we do that—but we assembled millions of them for every one we annihilated, and that chunk of nega-iron inside the magnetic bottle kept growing. And when you have a piece of negamatter you don't want, you can't just throw it out on the scrap-pile. We might have rocketed it into escape velocity and let it blow up in space, away from the Moon or any of the artificial satellites, but why waste it? So we're going to have the rocket eject it, and when it falls, we can see, by our telemetered instruments, just what happens."

"Well, won't it be annihilated by contact with atmosphere?" somebody asked.

"That's one of the things we want to find out," Pitov said. "We estimate about twenty percent loss from contact with atmosphere, but the mass that actually lands on the target area should be about forty kilos. It should be something of a spectacle, coming down."

"You say you had to assemble it, after creating the negative protons and neutrons and the positrons. Doesn't any of this sort of matter exist in nature?"

The man who asked that knew better himself. He just wanted the answer on the record.

"Oh no; not on this planet, and probably not in the Galaxy. There may be whole galaxies composed of nothing but negamatter. There may even be isolated stars and planetary systems inside our Galaxy composed of negamatter, though I think that very improbable. But when negamatter and posimatter come into contact with one another, the result is immediate mutual annihilation."

They managed to get away from the press, and returned as far as the bunkers, a mile and a half away. Before they went inside, Richardson glanced up at the sky, fixing the location of a few of the more conspicuous stars in his mind. There were almost a hundred men and women inside, each at his or her instru-

ments—view-screens, radar indicators, detection instruments of a dozen kinds. The reporters and telecast people arrived shortly afterward, and Eugenio Galvez took them in tow. While Richardson and Pitov were making their last-minute rounds, the countdown progressed past minus one hour, and at minus twenty minutes all the overhead lights went off and the small instrument operators' lights came on.

Pitov turned on a couple of view-screens, one from a pickup on the roof of the bunker and another from the launching-pad. They sat down side by side and waited. Richardson got his pipe out and began loading it. The loudspeaker was saying: "*Minus two minutes, one fifty nine, fifty eight, fifty seven*—"

He let his mind drift away from the test, back to the world that had been smashed around his ears in the autumn of 1969. He was doing that so often, now, when he should be thinking about—

"*Two seconds, one second*. FIRING!"

It was a second later that his eyes focussed on the left hand view-screen. Red and yellow flames were gushing out at the bottom of the rocket, and it was beginning to tremble. Then the upper jets, the ones that furnished power for the generators, began firing. He looked anxiously at the meters; the generators were building up power. Finally, when he was sure that the rocket would be blasting off anyhow, the separator-charges fired and the heavy cables fell away. An instant later, the big missile started inching upward, gaining speed by the second, first slowly and jerkily and then more rapidly, until it passed out of the field of the pickup. He watched the rising spout of fire from the other screen until it passed from sight.

By that time, Pitov had twisted a dial and gotten another view on the left hand screen, this time from close to the target. That camera was radar-controlled; it had fastened onto the approaching missile, which was still invisible. The stars swung slowly across the screen until Richardson recognized the ones he had spotted at the zenith. In a moment, now, the rocket, a hundred miles overhead, would be nosing down, and then the warhead would open and the magnetic field inside would alter and the mass of negamatter would be ejected.

The stars were blotted out by a sudden glow of light. Even at a hundred miles, there was enough atmospheric density to produce considerable energy release. Pitov, beside him, was muttering, partly in German and partly in Russian; most of what Richardson caught was figures. Trying to calculate how much of the mass of unnatural iron would get down for the ground blast. Then the right hand screen broke into a wriggling orgy of color, and at the same time every scrap of radio-transmitted apparatus either went out or began reporting erratically. The left hand screen, connected by wiring to the pickup on the roof, was still functioning. For a moment, Richardson wondered what was going on, and then shocked

recognition drove that from his mind as he stared at the ever-brightening glare in the sky.

It was the Auburn Bomb again! He was back, in memory, to the night on the shore of Lake Ontario; the party breaking up in the early hours of morning; he and Janet and the people with whom they had been spending a vacation week standing on the lawn as the guests were getting into their cars. And then the sudden light in the sky. The cries of surprise, and then of alarm as it seemed to be rushing straight down upon them. He and Janet, clutching each other and staring up in terror at the falling blaze from which there seemed no escape. Then relief, as it curved away from them and fell to the south. And then the explosion, lighting the whole southern sky.

There was a similar explosion in the screen, when the mass of nega-iron landed—a sheet of pure white light, so bright and so quick as to almost pass above the limit of visibility, and then a moment's darkness that was in his stunned eyes more than in the screen, and then the rising glow of updrawn incandescent dust.

Before the sound-waves had reached them, he had been legging it into the house. The television had been on, and it had been acting as insanely as the screen on his right now. He had called the State Police—the telephones had been working all right—and told them who he was, and they had told him to stay put and they'd send a car for him. They did, within minutes. Janet and his host and hostess had waited with him on the lawn until it came, and after he had gotten into it, he had turned around and looked back through the rear window, and seen Janet standing under the front light, holding the little dog in her arms, flopping one of its silly little paws up and down with her hand to wave goodbye to him.

He had seen her and the dog like that every day of his life for the last fifteen years.

"What kind of radiation are you getting?" he could hear Alexis Pitov asking into a phone. "What? Nothing else? Oh; yes, of course. But mostly cosmic. That shouldn't last long." He turned from the phone. "A devil's own dose of cosmic, and some gamma. It was the cosmic radiation that put the radios and telescreens out. That's why I insisted that the drone planes be independent of radio control."

They always got cosmic radiation from the micro-annihilations in the test-vault. Well, now they had an idea of what produced natural cosmic rays. There must be quite a bit of negamatter and posimatter going into mutual annihilation and total energy release through the Universe.

"Of course, there were no detectors set up in advance around Auburn," he said. "We didn't really begin to find anything out for half an hour. By that time, the cosmic radiation was over and we weren't getting anything but gamma."

"What—What has Auburn to do—?" The Russian stopped short. "You think this was the same thing?" He gave it a moment's consideration. "Lee, you're crazy!

There wasn't an atom of artificial negamatter in the world in 1969. Nobody had made any before us. We gave each other some scientific surprises, then, but nobody surprised both of us. You and I, between us, knew everything that was going on in nuclear physics in the world. And you know as well as I do—"

A voice came out of the public-address speaker. "Some of the radio equipment around the target area, that wasn't knocked out by blast, is beginning to function again. There is an increasingly heavy gamma radiation, but no more cosmic rays. They were all prompt radiation from the annihilation; the gamma is secondary effect. Wait a moment; Captain Urquiola, of the Air Force, says that the first drone plane is about to take off."

It had been two hours after the blast that the first drones had gone over what had been Auburn, New York. He was trying to remember, as exactly as possible, what had been learned from them. Gamma radiation; a great deal of gamma. But it didn't last long. It had been almost down to a safe level by the time the investigation had been called off, and, two months after there had been no more missiles, and no way of producing more, and no targets to send them against if they'd had them, rather—he had been back at Auburn on his hopeless quest, and there had been almost no trace of radiation. Nothing but a wide, shallow crater, almost two hundred feet in diameter and only fifteen at its deepest, already full of water, and a circle of flattened and scattered rubble for a mile and a half all around it. He was willing to bet anything that that was what they'd find where the chunk of negairon had landed, fifty miles away on the pampas.

Well, the first drone ought to be over the target area before long, and at least one of the balloons that had been sent up was reporting its course by radio. The radios in the others were silent, and the recording counters had probably jammed in all of them. There'd be something of interest when the first drone came back. He dragged his mind back to the present, and went to work with Alexis Pitov.

They were at it all night, checking, evaluating, making sure that the masses of data that were coming in were being promptly processed for programming the computers. At each of the increasingly frequent coffee-breaks, he noticed Pitov looking curiously. He said nothing, however, until, long after dawn, they stood outside the bunker, waiting for the jeep that would take them back to their bungalow and watching the line of trucks—Argentine army engineers, locally hired laborers, load after load of prefab-huts and equipment—going down toward the target-area, where they would be working for the next week.

"Lee, were you serious?" Pitov asked. "I mean, about this being like the one at Auburn?"

"It was exactly like Auburn; even that blazing light that came rushing down out of the sky. I wondered about that at the time—what kind of a missile would

produce an effect like that. Now I know. We just launched one like it.''

''But that's impossible! I told you, between us we know everything that was happening in nuclear physics then. Nobody in the world knew how to assemble atoms of negamatter and build them into masses.''

''Nobody, and nothing, on this planet built that mass of negamatter. I doubt if it even came from this Galaxy. But we didn't know that, then. When that negamatter meteor fell, the only thing anybody could think of was that it had been a Soviet missile. If it had hit around Leningrad or Moscow or Kharkov, who would you have blamed it on?''

DEATH INTO LIFE

Chapter 1 BATTLE

1. THE RAIDERS

Ten thousand boys in the upper air. Squadron upon squadron, their intricate machines thundered toward the target, heavy with death. Darkness below; and above, the stars. Below, the invisible carpet of the fields and little homes; above, and very far beyond those flashing stars, the invisible galaxies, gliding through the immense dark, squadron upon squadron of universes, deploying in the boundless and yet measured space.

In one of the bombers, seven boys. Seven young minds in patterned unity; each self-cherishing, but all knit inwardly together by fibres of steel-tempered comradeship. And all equally imprisoned, body and mind, in their intricate machinery.

Seven boys, and by strange chance a moth. It had strayed, no doubt, into the plane when the crew were taking their places. Since then it had wavered hither and thither, up and down its prison, from one domed transparent turret to another, teased by some obscure longing, needing though unwittingly a mate. Searching, softly colliding with now this young human cheek now that, kissing each one like the fluttered eyelash of an invisible beloved, it spent the numbered seconds of its life in vain. Or tremulously it thrust with feeble pressure against the prison windows, drawn by the pin-prick lights of the sky; but conceiving no immensity, no galaxies.

The seven boys too had their own, their more articulate yearnings. They craved the life that was normal to their human, and more conscious, but unfinished, nature. And like the moth sometimes their minds impotently fluttered at the prison windows, vainly questioning the stars.

2. THE REAR-GUNNER

The rear-gunner had never heard of galaxies. Even the stars were for him little more than drifting lights. He knew, of course, that they were suns; but what of it? The fact oppressed him. Shunned, it had sunk almost too deep for memory. And though, on nights like this he could not help remembering and wondering, after a moment's blankness he was bored. The stars, he felt, didn't help matters at all. Down here on earth it was hell, though streaked tantalizingly with unfulfilling joys, with sex and beer and the bitter shattering ecstasy of air-fighting. There were moments, too, rather frightening but somehow exalting, when something deep inside one seemed to take possession, so that the whole of life changed its colour and became terribly important, and one kicked oneself for being such a waster. But they didn't last, those moments. They were probably due to digestion, or glands or something. No, down here it was hell; and up there, just those blank stars. And now, to make things worse, he was starting a cold in his nose. Already it tickled and exasperated him, and already his head was none too clear. Would it spoil his nerve? Would he muff his part in the show? Whatever happened, he must not let the crew down. That really mattered. Mattered? Why 'mattered'? For a moment an abyss of emptiness opened before him, but he gallantly leapt it. Hell! He didn't know why it 'mattered', but it did; it mattered terribly that the crew should do well. Then, remembering an earlier raid, when the air round the plane was all fire and hammer-blows of blast, he felt an inner sinking. Of course the odds were that the whole seven of them would come through safely. But some crews would not. And sooner or later—He pictured the plane ablaze.

Panic swooped on him; but instantly he beat it off. One mustn't think such thoughts. Think rather of the pilot's skill and his own gunnery. Oh well! Quite soon they would be racing home in front of the dawn, lightened of bombs, and of fear. Then breakfast. How he wanted to live! The moth's careless kiss had stirred him strangely, like the tickle of a girl's hair on one's cheek, he thought. He had never been to bed with a girl yet, though he often pretended he had. And he might die tonight, never having done it. Why, he asked himself, was he so clumsy with girls? Perhaps he was really frightened of them, frightened of damaging something holy in them. He could never rid himself of that feeling, though he knew it was silly. They were just female animals, and he a male one. And so he covered his reverent shyness with a man-of-theworld swagger; but they saw through it. She saw through it. And she could lead him on and put him off so easily, the teasing little bitch. But oh God, perhaps—perhaps they were both messing things up; perhaps there really was something sacred; perhaps this business of loving was really the way to it, if only they had the right technique. By now the bomber was over the narrow sea. The risen moon's reflection was a splash of light ahead. The moth pressed more urgently toward the increased luminosity, while far below, unseen, each wave-crest, each droplet of spray and bubble of foam, was transfused with

moonlight.

The rear-gunner did not know that under this salt water was an ancient valley. There, forests had grown beside a great river. Mammoths had crushed their way through the brushwood, and swum the hurrying water, seeking new pastures in the future island. Crouching submen had used untrimmed stones for tools, and for weapons in' their subhuman quarrels, preluding bombs. But to the rear-gunner the narrow sea was only the protecting moat of his island country. And his country was-just fields and houses, cities and mines, the King and the Princesses, and so on. And of course the decentest people in the world; and the motherland of an Empire which was a spreading decency in every continent. Some said it wasn't, blast them! They ought to know better than to foul their own nest. But even if they were right, and the Empire was a huge fraud, what matter? It was only the people at home that really mattered. It was for them the crews were fighting, and for the whole decent way of life. Decent? What could that really mean? Sacred? Right absolutely? Or just the done thing, just a groundless habit?

Dark land now loomed beyond the moonlit sea. Soon they would be up against the enemy's defences, and then there must be no more dreaming. Thank God, though he was clumsy with a girl, he was quick and sure with a gun; and though on the way to the target his belly melted and his legs might sometimes quiver, he was cool enough when the show began. How the seven of them would act as one living thing, keying their functions perfectly together! But oh, he wanted to live on. Of course those buggers must be stopped from smashing everything. And the island fortress must be defended, and the Empire, and all that. Yes, and though one longed like hell for Civvy Street, it was good to know that one was in on the greatest show, and doing it with style, like the 'few', the superb 'few', in the Battle of Britain. But oh, he wanted to live.

Well, if he did live through to the peace, he wouldn't bother about politics. He'd have the hell of a good time to make up for all this. Suddenly he had a vision of himself with his medals and his wing on a shabby civilian coat, selling toothbrushes from door to door. That sort of thing happened after the last war, but it shouldn't happen to him! If they didn't give him something better than that, he and his kind would smash everything. The country certainly needed cleaning up. It was all the fault of those dirty Jews, no doubt. Well, if life meant living as an 'ex-serviceman', far better die tonight, and have done. But pain! Like when he burned his hand, but all over. And death? One never spoke about these things. He didn't even whisper about them to his secret self, not if he could help it. Tonight, somehow, he didn't care. He must face the facts. It was so much easier for the Germans and the Japs, who believed they were going to Valhalla or something. But for us, it was different. Of course the Padre was sure we were all bound for some kind of heaven or other. At least he said he was, but that was what he was paid for. Risky to bet on it, anyhow. But if death was just a snuffing out, a switching off the current,

what sense in all this, this mess of heaven and hell down here?

Once more the rear-gunner brooded on the wide pin-pricked dome. Those stars, those suns, were all looking at him with a cold objective stare; or blinking, the better to see him; the better to eat you up, my dear. At last he knew them for what they really were, the devils. So at least he half-persuaded himself.

Actually, of course, they ignored him as completely as he ignored any little phagocyte in his own blood-stream. The stars flowed in their thousands, their myriads, squadron upon squadron, phagocytes in the bloodstream of our galaxy. Depth behind depth behind depth, they streamed along the channels of space, the great stars and the small, the near and the far, the young giants and the senile dwarfs. And what their significance might be, neither the rear-gunner nor any earth-bound intelligence could ever know. Yet in the rear-gunner's mind some dark, threatening hint of their possible meaning bore heavily down. He shivered and blew his nose. Christ! What sense was there in those bloody great fires? Those flying sparks, perhaps, from some unseen, far greater fire. What a thought! He must pull himself together. For him the flares, the flak, the tracer, must have more meaning; and to keep a sharp eye and a steady hand. For at any moment now enemy fighters might appear, and still far ahead lay the target, the City.

3. THE CITY AND ITS PEOPLE

Far ahead the City lay in the moonlight, exposed, waiting. The sirens had sounded. Seen from the air by its patrolling fliers, this metropolis was a huge smear, spilt on the patterned carpet of forest and lakes, rivers and gossamer roads. It was an amorphous, yet an obscurely detailed patch, as of lichen or some fungoid growth. It sprawled over the plain, vaguely organic, splayed, a squashed animal on the tarmac. But it was not lifeless. Restless antennae of light reached upward from it, sweeping the sky, probing the upper air, fading before the starry depth. For they searched, those prying feelers, not for any heaven but for the expected re-onset of hell.

In a nearer view the City, the great living, wounded creature, still displayed areas of vitality, intact tissues of patterned streets and roofs. But there were huge tracts also of roofless honeycomb, the cell-lids sheared away, leaving frail, broken, wax-thin walls, the honey spilt and lost, the grubs all killed. There were broad regions, too, where the comb had been crushed and flattened, the fragile tenements shattered down into formless rubble.

Within this hive, this ants' nest, trampled and churned by giant footfall, insects were still alive. Though swarms of them had migrated outward into the forest and the frost to escape the nocturnal terror, many remained. Ousters were gathered in deep-lying crannies and into the buttressed shelters. Old people, their spirits already frayed out toward death, clung still to life's last threads. Moth-

ers clung to their babies, fiercely jealous lest death part them; and expectant mothers dreaded lest convulsive terror should drive the womb to vomit out too soon its unfinished treasure. Young men and women shared without privacy intimate delight, lest death should forestall them. But others of the city's swarm had taken their stations for defence against Hell's repeated impact. Gunners on their gun-sites waited. Fire-watchers on the roofs waited. Wardens were in the streets. Ambulance drivers were ready with their cars. In the casualty clearing stations doctors and nurses waited in tense idleness. In the mortuaries there were still displayed the unclaimed relics of the city's previous agony, old withered bodies, and bodies in shattered bloom, bodies in rags that were recently fine clothing, and bodies in rags long worn; and tom disjected members, strangely impersonal, that were once the familiar limbs of living workers, housewives, children.

Hidden among the ruins, armed men in uniform were held in leash, ready to discipline the population.

City of horror, tortured no less in spirit than in flesh. Like any city, it was a swarm of anxious little solipsistic individuals, each encased in its own world, which seemed to it the one and only, the true, the great world. For each of these beings, these postmen, charwomen, shopkeepers, company directors, carried about with it, as an aquatic insect might carry down a breathable air-bubble, its own particular little universe, a microscopic and fragmentary excerpt from the immense real; and yet a universe, a microcosm, complete with landscapes and sentient beings, with cities and a starry sky, whether of pin-pricks merely or giant suns; complete, too, with its own flux of time, whether of a lifetime's years only, or of historical centuries, or stellar æons. Within each universe the minute individual himself presided as a percipient, dynamic, scheming centre, endowing its peculiar bubble with fragrance and colour, with heats of desire and deadly chills of desolation. And these little selves, these body-minds, these vibrant instruments of passion and of will, insulated as mid-ocean islets, yet most strangely members one of another—might it be that these were fractional excerpts from one immensity, from one ultimate and single awareness? Or were they and all their kind throughout the cosmos utterly separate grains of consciousness, and the sole order of mentality in all the universe? Or did personal deity look down on them, sifting his myriad creatures like sand-grains between his fingers. Or were the little selves not in fact enduring spiritual substances at all, but merely evanescent wraiths of sentience and desire steaming from the physical processes of human bodies, like vapours from a dung-heap?

Viewed in the mass, as units in a city's or a world's population, or as insects in an ants' nest, how indistinguishable they were; their prized differences merely the infinitesimal irregularities of a machined pattern. Yet in a closer, a more intimate view, how unique each one! Here, a little universe predominantly sunlit; until the common disaster of our times eclipsed the sun for all. There, a microcosm

of sheer desolation. Here, a cauldron of furious events; there, a stagnant puddle. Here, a mean and shrunken universe, confined within a network of commercial or political intrigue, or of contrived occasions of self-display; there, an ample and ever-expanding microcosm, mirroring, however imperfectly, the whole tumult of our modern world, the sequence of human history, the dawn of man, and of the cosmos. Here, and here, and here, a universe disjointed by foolish dreams or crazy myths. But there, and there, a very simple microcosm, devoid of all immensities and subtleties, yet (who knows?) perhaps essentially true to the ultimate temper of reality, because lit inwardly by a few bright comradeships and loves.

And the little sentient, dynamic centres themselves, how diverse! This, a spider, spreading, day in, day out, its filaments to bind the wings of the innocent; that, a warm fountain of light irradiating neighbour universes. This, living by rote, unquesting as a sleep-walker; that, with fibres of martyred nerve extending into every cranny of its little world.

So diversified were the city's millions in individual temper; and yet, under the stress of a common delusion, a common tyranny, a common tragedy, all now were harshly likened by the impress of an iron convention.

Crippled now, the city, but unflinchingly game; with the fury of the cornered rat, the tiger at bay. Proud and loyal people; but now bewildered, tragic. Their idols crumbling. Gentle at heart, most biddable. Delighting in the family and the Christmas tree; in the pregnant tome, the far-flung theory. Opening the heavens with their music. A people consciously how civilized; but latently barbarian; like all men, but perhaps more dangerously. Under all their subtlety, too simple. Under their gentleness, teased by the itch of their own brutality; like all men, though perhaps more fiercely. A people easily enslaved to brutish gods; the more so, since a nobler God had failed them. For now the old gentle faith of the West lay rotting in their hearts. Some, no doubt, still cherished it, were martyred for it, witnessing against the tyranny; yet for most it was dead. How faithfully had this people obeyed their new prophet, their frenzied medicine-man. Giving him their boys and girls to remake to his dream. Burning the books. Impounding, killing, torturing, to make a unified people. Swarming over the frontiers in the prophet's name to make a unified world. Demented with visions, they had strained forward towards the promised land, the valhalla of glory and world-mastery and plenty, these self-chosen saviours of mankind. But mankind had refused them, had banded against them. And now their vision was fading. Not merely because their armies were driven back, their cities blasted; in their own hearts a spirit long dormant stirred in revolt against the prophet and his purpose. Was it perhaps because, month after month, year after year, the eyes of their victims and slaves had stabbed them? Impotent pin-pricks, merely, but infinitely reiterated. Or was it that their own suffering was at last teaching them gentleness?

Unhappy, tragic people. Deep sunk in guilt; but scapegoats also of a guilty world.

4. THE ATTACK

The straining ears of the city's defenders were touched by a shadow of sound. Sound was it, or fancy? If sound, was it thunder, or the reverberation of distant battle? Advancing waves from the remote tumult vibrated through the city's foundations, and slid along the air-ways of the streets. The ruins trembled. The whole great wounded creature quivered in every cell. And where the sound travelled, there travelled also throughout the city's population, among the watchers at their posts and the crowds gathered in the shelters, a sigh, concealed by each from each.

Suddenly the city's own guns shouted and raged. Windows rattled, crockery jangled. The sky's pin-prick stars were outshone by short-lived brilliants. Ten thousand boys were in the upper air, intent on slaughter; fair game, these, for the guns. And now the downpour of great bombs tortured the city's heart, each striking into street or building, with fierce rebound of fire; all intermingling their spreading blast as raindrops their rings on a tormented pool. And so, in half an hour, one more tract of the city's honeycomb was obliterated, as by giant footfall. Once more, homes were disembowelled, or their fronts tom off, exposing the doll's-house rooms and furniture. Factories, offices, schools, churches, became instantly mere rubble. And in these conglomerates of concrete and brick, of beams and girders, here and there were human bodies. Of these, many were quiet, their breath and life crushed out of them; but some still breathed, and cried. And now great fires were jubilant parasites upon the city, reaching their bright limbs skyward, their dark plumes above the bombers.

In those minutes, hundreds upon hundreds of the little personal universes vanished like the bubbles of a drying foam. Their vital centres annihilated, they were extinguished, as a lit room ceases when the lamp is shattered. And of the survivors some, because they were symbiotic with some slaughtered one, were themselves henceforth mutilated almost to death.

The city's bright antennae swept and probed the sky. In the upper air the bombers picked their courses among cloud-high waving stems of enemy light and bursting blossoms of fire. The ten thousand were performing their appointed duty. For them the city's heart was a target to be obliterated with finished skill before breakfast. That it was also a tissue of lives and loves, was by most, in the stress of the attack, forgotten. But for some it was obtrusive, and to be anxiously shunned; and by a few the stab of pity was turned aside by a carapace of self-righteousness; while fewer still, misshapen minds, secretly relished the vicarious agony. But the more lucid gravely faced the horror that they were inflicting, as

one may press the core out of a boil; and in full awareness they carried on with the work.

Each crew was a steel-knit unity of special functions and diverse mentalities, obedient to a common purpose. Though each boy in each crew was indeed his own cherished self, with a private theme of life recalcitrant to this dread night, yet each was self-yieldingly organic to the crew. Here and there, maybe, some misfit in the mental pattern, some lone outsider or some untamed spirit, marred the crew's unity; flustering all with mutual doubt and self-tender fear, poisoning the composite being's single-heartedness and proficiency; much as an aching tooth, or any other thorn in the flesh, may loosen an athlete's unity of eye and muscle.

But this discordancy was rare. Each crew, within the little universe of its common lethal purpose, was an integral creature. And the whole armada of aircraft, stooping squadron by squadron to the target, projecting their deadly spawn into the city's heart with stop-watch precision and overwhelming concentration of onset, moved as a single creature, an organic and intelligent swarm of beings, self-tender, but self-yielding to the common life, the common purpose.

Not inviolate the bombers. Now one and now others, found by the city's antennae, caught by the city's guns or by airborne defenders, streaked the darkness with a long downward curve of flame; or blazed as a sudden eruption, then vanished.

The moth still vacillated up and down its flying prison, vaguely dissatisfied. But for the seven, the climax of their journey was now at hand, the releasing of their death-load. Rapt now in the urgency of their task, they were seven organs of one mechanical winged creature. If any thoughts from the world of individual living should flutter into any of the seven minds, these must be instantly destroyed. The composite life of the crew must be absolute. The moth only, unwilling and uncomprehending passenger, was separate. Imprisoned physically, it remained mentally unfettered to the human tyranny, through its very obtuseness.

The rear-gunner was happy. Already he had killed, and now he waited for the next attacker. But when again the moth touched him with the magic of a remote though so familiar world, his heart tripped; then instantly recovered. Fiercely he braced himself.

Suddenly the plane was caught by convergent fingers of light. Near shell-bursts blasted it hither and thither. In the storm of jagged illumination, the rear-gunner saw for a moment the moth, a tremulous creamy flake pinned on darkness.

Then overwhelmingly the rear-gunner's universe became all brilliance and crashing noise: Wild pain flooded him through every nerve. Every cell of his body's surface was attacked by smashing blast and furious heat. And so with all the seven.

The moth's papery tissues instantly became a whiff of disorganized molecules. The flesh of all the seven boys was agonizingly disintegrated. Seven young brains, the centres and kingpins of seven universes, received their last experience. Then these too became mere whiffs of gas, a rabble of wandering molecules.

And the seven young selves?

The rear-gunner's ultimate moments were wholly occupied with pain, the frantic revulsion of his members against destruction. All other experienced things in his universe, the pin-prick stars that were suns, the crew's sacred comradeship, the moth's kiss, and all his nineteen years of growing, were obliterated in the white heat of his body's agony. Then pain itself ceased. The rear-gunner was annihilated.

5. FIRST INTERLUDE: WHAT IS THIS DYING?

In the tube we said good-bye. You on the platform, I in the train. In the time of the rockets.

Smiling, you stepped back and blew me a kiss. It was bright with all our past.

The doors slid to, dividing us.

The chance that we should not meet any more was only, I told myself, one in many millions. And yet—that very morning, and only a few streets away, scores of people had been killed. Today, as on a thousand days, they had yawned themselves out of bed, dressed, breakfasted, set off about their business,' then suddenly, or slowly and miserably, they had stopped being. Or so it seems.

What is this dying? No one who has done it can tell us what it is like.

Are we mere sparks of sentience that death extinguishes, or fledgeling immortals who fear to leave the nest? Or both, or neither?

We are conceived in mystery, and into mystery we die.

Let us, at least, not clamour for immortality, not pledge our hearts to it. If the end is sleep, well, when we are tired, sleep is the final bliss.

And yet perhaps what dies is only the dear trivial familiar self of each. Perhaps in our annihilation some vital and eternal thing does break wing, fly free. We cannot know.

But this we know: whether we are annihilated or attain in some strange way eternal life, to have loved is good.

Chapter 2 EPHEMERAL SPIRITS

1. THE INSTANT OF DEATH

At the very point of his annihilation the rear-gunner suffered a strange experience, and one not easily to be told. He had already swooned free from pain,

and was falling headlong into nothingness. In that final instant, suddenly he woke into awareness of his whole past life. His whole past universe flashed miraculously upon him in exquisite early-morning clearness and manifold detail. Once more and all at once he was aware of all his days and nights, but as a string of variegated beads laid out before him, alternate light and dark. Each was figured with the unique experiences of that particular dated night or day. There, as though present, he saw the day when he had first been taken to school; the night of an indescribable nightmare which kept its teeth in him even for many nights and days; the day when, a school-boy, he had glimpsed divinity in a schoolgirl; the day when he had started work in a bank; the night of his first operational flight across the narrow sea. He saw too that the string holding all his days and nights together was his cherished and continuously growing body, now in the instant of destruction. Then, it lived, and was the vehicle of all memory, the medium of all passions and ecstasies, the source of all teasing hungers and all satisfaction. But now his flesh was in the very act of death, his mind in the instant of annihilation. Strange, strange that a mere instant should have room for crowding thoughts and desires, and contain within itself all his nineteen years!

At one end of the long sequence of his days he saw his first day of all, knotted into the peaceful darkness of the womb, a day of painful and novel churning and pressing, and of an agony of constriction, followed by the sting of cool air on tender skin, and a sudden smack that roused his lungs to their first breath and outcry. In the stress of this earliest and most deeply buried of his memories the rear-gunner was swept again by floods of blind infantile terror, rage and self-pity; and of yearning for the womb's peace. And yet, surveying his first day from the miraculous viewpoint of his last instant, he no longer desired the womb, which seemed now about to swallow him once more, and for ever. Now, all his desire was for life, and the fulfilment of life's frustrated promises. For there before him lay all his days, frustrated; bright with hopes and partial satisfactions, but scored over with countless boredoms, distresses, falsified intimations of future bliss, Greedily he licked up all the sweetness of his precious numbered days, and spat out all their bitterness. And with self-pity he brooded on the mature manhood that he was never to taste.

But now, in this same miraculously pregnant instant at the point of his annihilation, the rear-gunner became aware of a strange conflict within himself. With his whole being, seemingly, he was protesting against annihilation; and yet at the same time he in some deep way accepted annihilation with equanimity. With his whole being, seemingly, he clung greedily to every sweet thing in his lifetime; and yet also he turned away impatiently in search of ulterior ends, It was almost as though two selves of contrary tempers assessed each day and minute of his life, The one was recognizably himself as he had always been, an eager lapper-up of pleasures and spewer-out of pains. The other, the frightening and inhuman in-

truder, that was so alien and yet somehow more deeply himself than his familiar self could ever be, lapped up nothing, spewed nothing out, This formerly submerged but now active part of him, if such it could be accounted, accepted pleasures and pains alike dispassionately, judging each one for some ulterior significance, inquiring of each whether the issue had in fact been life or death, an increased range and penetration of personal being, or a mere crippling. Thus in assessing the occasion when he had shockingly burnt his hand the rear-gunner was twiminded about it. As his normal self, he was transfixed by the memory of the pain; but in the other mode of his being, though equally aware of the body's distress, he surveyed it quietly, and with a sort of voiceless laughter at the other's gross enslavement. For this, after all, had been not a crippling but an enlarging, an illuminating, experience. Had it not initiated him into the formidable mystery of suffering? And how could one begin to be a man without such initiation?

But his normal self greeted this incursion of a superior mentality with incomprehension, ridicule and hate. He protested to himself, 'If I must die, I'll die honest to God as I really am, and not be a sham padre or a highbrow. Pain is just hell. I see no good in it, I hate it, I loathe it. To hell with it!'

In his final instant, the rear-gunner tasted again the thousand little experiences of wounded vanity or social mortification that had moth-eaten the fair textile of his life, as when he had been cold-shouldered by the belle of his suburb, or when he had discovered that a new and brilliant friend lived in a shabby street. But now he was torn by the violent discord between his familiar and his more lucid selves. The one surrendered abjectly to the long-past horror of social embarrassment; the other was tortured by shame of a very different order, shame at puerility and meanness. In particular, over the friend's back-street home he was now thrown into an agony of self-contempt. For the friendship, which, as he now saw, might have been a quickening influence in his life, had been poisoned by his snobbery. In that first act of withdrawal, and in many other betrayals, up and down his life, he had given poison to his own soul, so that he became each time a little blinder, a little more heartless.

Assessing his blundering approach to the girl whom he had recently designed to possess, he saw now in his awakened mood that never once had he come face to face with her as a living spirit. Neither of them had any real perception either of themselves or of one another or of their relationship. Each had again and again wounded the other, not by cruelty but by sheer self-absorption and obtuseness. On an occasion when she, in distress over a crushed butterfly, had looked to him for sympathy, he had failed to conceive that her misery might have some hidden source. Secretly contemptuous of her childishness, he had petted her and made love to her. But though she clung to him, a strange chill came over her. And presently he grew exasperated at her unresponsiveness, and ridiculed her for grieving so much over a trifle. Then unaccountably she was seized with

violent weeping. The rear-gunner in his last instant and his miraculous lucidity saw, what neither of them had at the time recognized, that through the butterfly's destruction she had glimpsed with lightning suddenness the horror in which countless fighting men and whole populations of the oppressed were at that I moment engulfed. She was flung into a desperate conflict between compassion for the oppressed and a new sense that to participate in slaughter, even for the rescue of the tormented peoples, was hideous sacrilege; though a sacrilege which in a sick world needs must be perpetrated, to avoid a sacrilege more hideous. But all this happened upon a plane of her being which she had never before entered. Bewildered and terrified, she fled from it into mere pity for the butterfly. But vague perplexity and unreasonable terror remained. And in coming to him as an unhappy child rather than as a woman, and in confiding to him a seemingly trivial grief that tapped deeper sorrows, she was calling out to him for more than the familiar love-making; she was imploring him for understanding and for the healing of a wound which she herself dared not scrutinize; in fact she asked for love, for the mutual searching and cherishing of beings diverse in temper, yet members of one another. All this the awakened self of the rear-gunner now recognized. And bitterly he despised himself for his past obtuseness.

Yet in the very act of self-contempt, he also, as his normal self, resented and feared this intrusion of clearer insight. 'What on earth', he demanded, 'has come over me? What's the matter with me? Where does all this highbrow slush come from? Not from me, surely. I'm not like that; I never was. And anyhow, what's a girl for? Damn it, it wasn't up to me to get her out of her silly muddle. All that sob-stuff over an insect!'

In this matter of violence the new self of the rear-gunner revolted with peculiar horror from his normal self. The living boy had always accepted, though with obscure disquiet, the necessity of using violence to defend the right. He himself had been called to kill and to share in killing. For the crew's sake and for his country's sake he had played his part in slaughter, sealing off in a neglected corner of his mind all realization of the actuality, and of the horror and shame that it engendered. He had told himself, 'It's dirty work, but it has got to be done. If we're damned for doing it, well we're damned, but it has got to be done.'

His new self, however, was outraged and bitterly remorseful. His quickened imagination revealed with grim faithfulness the agony of the enemy airman smashed by machine-gun bullets or cannon-shell, and of the enemy citizens shattered or buried or burnt by the crew's bombing. But more shameful even than this horror itself was the spiritual betrayal that made it possible, the betrayal of that which his new perception revealed as the most sacred thing, the bond of brotherhood between all personal beings. New thoughts welled up in him, thoughts which he could only with difficulty express, since his language was limited by the dead boy's crude speech. Searching beyond the range of the rear-gunner's familiar

jargon, he brought out from the forgotten recesses of that mind words and phrases dusty with neglect. 'How could I be so—so insensitive,' he questioned, 'so—coarse-grained, dull-witted, brutish, and so cowardly, as to take part in all that savagery, that wickedness! And how can I ever wipe out, expiate, that sin? I have wakened to find myself up to the neck in filth at the bottom of a deep and stinking pit from which I can never climb.'

But presently his mood changed. Lifted as it were outside himself, he regarded more objectively not only his participation in murder but his whole life of rudderless drifting.

Reverting to the old jargon, 'Poor mut, poor twerp!' he sighed. Then, painfully seeking out words that could express more faithfully his new quickened perception, 'That poor sleep-walker', he said, 'could not possibly have done otherwise. How could so insensitive a being have struck free from the universal sin? How could anyone so scared of disapproval, so cowed by the tribe's censure, have seen that the tribe was wrong, have stood out against the tribe's will? The most that could be expected of him was that he should obey the tribal call to give up his freedom and learn to fight and in the end to die. And this he did.'

But now another thought slowly took shape under the anxious scrutiny of the rear-gunner's newly awakened and more lucid self. Surveying all his fragmentary and hitherto undigested, uncriticized acquaintance with the world of men, he saw that even if he had been clearly conscious of the enormity of slaughter, yet to stand aside would have been wrong. For to stand aside would have been to refuse a desperate call for rescue. Millions of human beings, suffering under the most hideous tyranny, cried out for practical help, and there was no way of bringing them relief save the forlorn attempt of war. To preach human brotherhood and set an example of non-violence would in this case be quite futile. Moreover so deep-seated and subtle was the perversion of all men's minds, so crazily were most men addicted to false values, and so desperate was the present plight of the human race, that nothing but violence, nothing but ruthless slaughter, could prevent the destruction of the very possibility of a better world.

'If I had stood aside', he admitted, 'I should have been a peculiarly ugly kind of snob, I should have been guilty of a sort of snobbery of righteousness. I should have been just washing my hands of the whole mess to keep my precious self clean.'

Yet when he remembered stories he had heard of the selfless devotion of some who refused to take any part in war, he wondered whether they had perhaps some vision that he still lacked, so confident were they that violence must always in the long run inevitably do more harm than good.

But presently he told himself, 'Those visionaries may, just may, be right; and certainly they were true to their own faith. But—how can one refuse for a doubt-

ful vision a present and urgent cry for help against cruel oppressors, torturers?'

Bewilderment and horror weighed down on him. 'Surely', he cried, 'the world must be sheer hell if the only hope is that millions, in order to rescue the tortured, will force themselves to use all the devilish devices of war, will freely commit this foul crime against—against what? Call it the spirit. This crime against the spirit, against the very thing that they want to defend. Yes, surely this world of ours is sheer hell.'

But recalling the brighter and fairer things in his own short life, he protested, 'No, not hell, but something lovely that has been spoilt, something of lovely promise but terribly hurt, frustrated. Where was it, and when, and in what form that the poison entered?' These questions were beyond his wit to answer; for his knowledge of the world was but the knowledge of an average young man; and, though his intelligence had been quickened by death, ignorance defeated it.

When the rear-gunner's two selves, if two they were, and if truly 'selves', and if both were indeed 'his', reviewed his final instant of agony and annihilation, their feelings were very different. The normal boy, faced with utter destruction, cried out, seemingly with the whole force of his being, 'Oh, Christ, let me live!' And with that last desperate prayer the rear-gunner himself, the normal, greedy, snobbish, fear-tortured, yet within the crew well-disciplined and comradely, self of the rear-gunner utterly ceased to be. Surely the outcry of that poor self-cherishing and doomed individual mind might well have echoed from star to star, from galaxy to galaxy, might have reached even to the ears of compassionate God, if such there be; with the similar last cries of his six companions and the other slaughtered crews and the many killed citizens in their fiery honeycomb, and all the killed on land and sea and in the air, in every quarter of the planet.

But the other, alien self of the rear-gunner, and the alien self in all the company of the killed, scorned that prayer which all had prayed. 'Not I,' affirmed the rear-gunner in his more lucid mode, or the alien being that had awakened in the rear-gunner's annihilation, 'Surely not I, but some other, was guilty of that cry, some mere brute, some subhuman thing involved with me.'

Thus in his last instant the rear-gunner, like all the killed, had been torn by inner conflict. The normal boy, at the very point of extinction, was outraged by the aloofness and ulterior searching of that stranger within himself. He supposed that the coldness of desire in him must surely be death itself already dissolving his vitality and disintegrating his mind. Yet in the same instant he, his very self (if his self it truly was), his new, alien and quickened self, assessing his past life's little worth, declared, 'All my life I shirked the test. I took the easy line. I lapped up little pleasures and was cowed by little pains. I turned away from every opportunity of growth, held back always by sluggishness or fear or blank obtuseness, smothering the dim light in me at every step by my self-generated fog of trivial

cravings. What might I have done, what become, if I had not chosen always to remain a sleep-walker. And now it is too late. Never will those lost openings be restored to me.' Remorse and self-despising gripped him. Particularly he loathed his baser self for that final desperate cry to a divinity in whom he had never really believed, and whose name had hitherto been for him little more than an imprecation. 'Abject creature that I am,' he said, 'nailed to self-pity! What matter that such a moth must die without fulfilment?'

Not that even in his more lucid mentality the rear-gunner accepted annihilation wholly without misgiving. Though he cared nothing for his personal survival, yet it seemed that with his ending must also come an end to something perhaps more worthy. Seemingly the whole little treasure of experience which he had gathered in his brief lifetime must now, with his extinction, be itself extinguished. If only he could know that in some way it contributed to some whole of cosmical or divine experience, as a raindrop to the ocean! But he had no reason to believe that this was so; and in his lucid mode he scorned to believe without reason, merely for comfort. Well, the ocean would not be perceptibly the poorer without his raindrop. Moreover, as he now bitterly realized, he had lived so obtusely that perhaps nothing whatever in his whole life was creatively unique and worthy of preservation. True, but what of his six companions, and the thousands of war dead and all the myriads that had died and were to die in all lands and ages? And what of all those stars that were indeed suns, and the minded worlds that perhaps were sprinkled, however sparsely, up and down the galaxies? Did all their vast treasure of experience simply vanish with the ephemeral individuals who had supported it?

The rear-gunner, even in his more lucid self, was oppressed by the seeming futility of all existence. But he told himself that even the loss of all that treasure mattered nothing. Really what mattered was just that the upshot of all those myriad lives should be the practical advancement of their particular worlds in individual happiness. But happiness? The happiness of insects like himself? Not sheer happiness, then, but the fulfilling of these insects in ever richer, keener, more discriminate, more creative living. (What unfamiliar language this! From what hidden source did it rise up in him?) The fulfilling of insects, generation after generation, in ever finer awareness! Then, was the justification of the æons of misery and pain some final, glorious, cosmical Utopia? And would it be a dreadfully superior Utopia of super-minds intent on super-highbrow activities? Once more oppression seized the rear-gunner. And presently he thought of the inevitable decline and fall of that far-off society. For scientists declared that the whole universe was running down like a clock, and that in the end all life would be extinguished. In imagination he saw a million frozen worlds, each sprinkled with frozen honeycombs that once were cities, their features now almost obliterated by the corpse coverlet of ultimate snow.

The rear-gunner, or that which had awakened in the rear-gunner's final instant, was overwhelmed by a great weariness and loneliness, so that he cared only for sleep. Vaguely he thought of those occasions when, after a hard day, he had dropped into bed, and down, down, into the peace of sleep. (The womb again.) On those nights, had he on the brink been told that, if he slept now, he would never wake again, he would have leapt from his bed; but now, though believing that his sleep was to be eternal, he sighed thankfully and drew the blanket of oblivion over his head. Presently even the ultimate desire for extinction was expunged from him; and with it, all thinking, all awareness.

2. ANNIHILATION AND SURVIVAL

After an instant or an æon, he who had been the rear-gunner in the aeroplane where the moth was imprisoned woke from his nescience. And it was as though he woke into a new nature.

He took up once more the thread of his meditation, but now the whole climate of his being had changed, as though sleep had profoundly refreshed him. He smiled at his recent despond, reminding himself of the feebleness of human intellect. How should human animals, those upright worms with swelled heads, predict the issue of the æons? And if the last event must indeed be ultimate and eternal death, might not all still be well? After full achievement, what better than sleep? But anyhow, what matter! How foolish to despair over a disaster so remote and so uncertain!

Once more, he considered the chequered rosary of his own past days and nights. Little enough of achievement, certainly, could be seen in them. But he viewed them now no longer with a sense of personal frustration, no longer with exasperation and self-blame. Somehow a weight seemed to have fallen from him, as though an aeroplane had jettisoned its load, and suddenly flown free. Pitifully, but not with self-pity, he now fingered the little rosary of those days and nights. 'Poor boy,' he said, 'so greedy was he for delight, and so misused by the world, and by himself. So unaware was he of all but his trivial hungers and pains. No! Not I! That poor sleep-walker was never I.'

And yet, fingering again those beads of time, and looking more closely into the heart of each obscurely translucent globe, he began to see that there were indeed occasions in the rear-gunner's life of which he could without hesitation declare, 'Now that, yes that, truly was I. Then, and then, and then, I, the real I, did indeed wake in the depth of the dreamer's heart; and I, I, took possession for a while.'

He watched the schoolboy, startled once by seeing with new eyes a certain outlawed schoolmate, so that with fists and tongue and heart he hotly championed him. And when he had so thrillingly greeted divinity in a schoolgirl, his adoration,

though callow and muddied with self-importance, was in essence disinterested. Responding to that alien sweetness he had indeed in his childish way saluted divinity. That adoration of another, that craving to live wholly for another's sake, that obscure longing to find with another some still inconceivable but exquisite union and rebirth as 'we'! There had been moments, too, when trees and flowers and clouds had opened strange windows for him. And sometimes, in his training for the air, most unexpectedly, a mathematical formula had stirred him with its economy and far range of significance. Music, too, had now and again struck from him a spark of perplexed worship. And after all, had he not given himself without reserve to the crew's life, in service of a cause how vaguely conceived yet none the less recognized as binding? For that cause he, who feared death as a child the dark, had died.

'Yes!' affirmed the being who had awakened out of the rear-gunner, 'on those occasions it was indeed I, my very self, who saw, felt, spoke, took action.' And as he peered into the dimly luminous heart of each past day, he recognized everywhere traces of a lucidity which he need not disown, though everywhere it was overlayed with the poor sleepwalker's obtuseness. 'Though he was not I,' he mused, 'yet every day and every night I was astir within him, though drowsily, in the dark womb of his nature.'

'But I?' he wondered, 'Who am I? What is it that I truly am? The creature that gave birth to me, the creature that cried out for immortality, is quite extinguished. It has no part in my future; whilst I, escaping from its death, am cut off from all nourishment from its finished life. And yet I live on. The cord is cut, but the first breath in the new world not taken. Unless this dark isolation ceases, I too, through sheer lack of experience, must soon be annihilated. Oh for a world, a heaven, where at last I can begin to fulfil the promise of my nature! Oh for the clash and concord and creative intercourse with others of my kind with whom I can rise beyond myself to richer, keener being!'

3. THE MEMBERS OF THE CREW

Musing in this style he suddenly recognized that a world was all the while around him. So absorbed had he been in his inner-drama that he had not noticed it. But now he knew that he had been all the while afloat in the sky over the burning city. He was the centre of an unbroken sphere of vision. Bodiless, his seeing was in no direction obstructed. Below him lay the fiery honeycomb; above, the climbing smoke plumes, with here and there a star, and the moon, now forging through little clouds. On every side he saw war's shafts of light and bursting suns of fire. An obscurity downwind was the fading cloudlet left by the bomber's recent explosion. Presently a near shell-burst engulfed him for a moment in an extremity of light and noise, but painlessly. And then an aeroplane, roaring out of

the darkness, traversed harmlessly the very point from which he saw.

But once more his attention was distracted from his physical surroundings, for he became aware of the mental presence of his six killed companions.

The past lives of all were bared, like his own, for contemplation by all seven of them. It was as though all seven stood now together, each viewing all their seven pasts from the final instant in which all had died; as though all together looked along seven radiating tunnels of biography. All were embarrassingly aware of each other's most intimate experience. For though all had rid themselves of their mortal natures, they were as yet not fully equipped for mutual insight. Each was still fettered by much of the ignorance and prejudice of his particular life. And so, in each, the habit of comradeship and self-yielding to the crew's community was now put to new strain by this unwished-for intimacy. Formerly each, while outwardly performing his office in the common life, had preserved an inner sanctuary which the others could not, would not, violate. But now, in a bare instant, mutual perception was thrust on all. Shames formerly covered were now exposed. Conflicts formerly disciplined for the crew's sake, but always smouldering, now flamed.

Secretly, the pilot had always despised the rear-gunner's accent; the rear-gunner had resented the pilot's self-assurance. Forbearance for the crew's sake had restrained each from wounding the other. But now each looked with horror and incipient hate at the other's unexpressed but now unconcealable hostility. The navigator's diffidence, which had forced him always to be the last to go through a door, was now seen by all to be the fruit of secret annoyance and envy. The bomb-aimer's stammer, formerly an occasion for kindly indulgence, though for unexpressed contempt, revealed its root in the shame of an obscene desire which made all shudder and draw away.

There was one of the seven, the engineer, a newcomer, who in the air was wholly of the crew, bound by the filaments of the crew's unity; but off-duty he had remained apart, because of rough speech and manners and an inscrutable reticence. He now appeared to his six companions almost as a member of a strange barbarian tribe, or a creature of another world, never explored by any of the six. They, haling from little surburban villas and secondary schools, felt themselves to be integral to society. They regarded the policeman not indeed as their servant but at least as the necessary defender of orderly and decent living. But this other, nurtured in a northern work-town where work had formerly come almost to a standstill, where the common fate was hunger, sickness and social impotence, saw the whole convention of society's Structure as a device of the prosperous to keep the poor in subjection. Every policeman was for him an enemy. Looking down the vista of his days and nights, this seventh member saw, and his six companions saw with him, a filthy urchin sitting on the kerb-stone playing with a broken bottle in

the gutter; while in the six other lifetimes all observed nice children sitting on suburban grass-plots. They watched the schoolboy in a crowded classroom discovering his native power, but constantly hampering himself by rebellious acts and consequent punishments. They saw the young man unemployed, gripped in that steel trap of privation and futility, listening to angry speeches at street comers and in shabby halls, poring over revolutionary tracts, and presently himself making earnestly subversive speeches, or skirmishing with policemen. They saw not only these distressing events but also the inner passion exfoliating day by day in the young man's heart, the passion of the iconoclast and the revolutionary. And they were outraged. For it seemed to these others, who, for all their man-of-the-world cynicism, had never really questioned the fundamental integrity of their society, that this passion sprang merely from self-pride and envy.

But the young revolutionary, looking into the lives of these sons of business men, clerks, shop assistants, mechanics, was amazed. Their parents, one and all, had been compelled by social circumstance to fight for a living against innumerable competitors, all seeking desperately for some foothold on the slope that leads up to affluence but down to penury; yet, these fathers and these sons, though they had been nearly always discontented and harassed, blamed merely their bad luck, or the state of trade, or bolshevik machinations, or the Jews, or the inveterate evil in man's heart. They never had any thought that their troubles were in fact the issue of some deep-lying social disease, and that they were poor little infected cells in the social body. But, to the seventh member of the crew, the engineer, it seemed that for such as these, and indeed for all men, there could never be any hope unless they could learn to understand the great social forces which had produced all this frustration and misery. And understanding would surely drive them to take action together about it.

All seven were plunged into revulsion and protest, long-enduring (so it seemed to them) as a lifetime of painful learning; but, measured in physical time, it happened in the instant. Little by little, yet in the instant, after the spell of bewilderment and horror a change came over the seven emergent spirits of the crew. For each of these beings, who had been through that strange remaking which had befallen the rear-gunner, were now apt for learning. They were no longer simply boys who had died. They were the beings that had been obscurely born of those seven, and had awakened into clear awareness in the extinction of those mortal seven. Therefore, after the first revulsion, they yearned together, each saluting the other's individuality with respect, and seeking mutual insight. The pilot and the rear-gunner laughingly forgave each other. The bombaimer's obsession was seen by all no longer as a devilish lust but as a psychical scar left by misfortune. The revolutionary was no longer spurned. For now the six saw that their condemnation of him was less moral than snobbish, a mere unthinking rejection of standards alien to the tribe. They reminded themselves that this seeming enemy of

society, whose energy appeared to be sheer hate, had been also their own trusted companion in the crew, one who in action had been well-integrated with them, one to whom all had paid a special though none an intimate admiration.

Eager to do justice, they looked with clearer vision. They saw the schoolboy in his bare home struggling with his homework, while the mother soothed a crying baby. They saw the parents daily trying to conceal mutual irritation under their sorely tried affection. They saw the lad himself noting day by day that the source of all their distress was poverty. And they saw him conceiving through suffering and mutual aid a passion of comradeship for certain schoolmates and young fellow gangsters, and a growing need to give himself in corporate and comradely activity.

They savoured more intelligently the lad's frustration in unemployment; and his induction into the corporate life of the revolutionary Party, where at last he found peace in self-dedication to the revolution. With curiosity, with growing interest, and then with warm accord, they watched the young man's mind form itself by reading and the experience of social action, until he was fully disciplined to a commanding idea, the conception of mankind as something of high promise but of crippled actuality.

Through his fervour the six themselves now for the first time felt the power of this human gospel. 'It is indeed largely so,' they said, 'though the mortal boys that gave us being knew nothing of it.'

But they saw also, with their newly quickened intelligence, that the revolutionary's majestic vision of class conflict and social evolution, though in a way true and serviceable, reached nowhere into the depths of truth; and that their comrade, spellbound by a theory, had conceived the world too glibly. They were distressed, too, that in service of the revolution he had often broken the moral law that they unquestioningly accepted. For the sake of a political though never for a personal advantage he had often lied; given false interpretations of facts, vilified the personal character of the opponents and half-hearted friends of the revolution. In their post-mortal lucidity they could well understand how revolutionary passion had seemed to justify such conduct; but they were perplexed, recognizing that to behave in this way was to do violence to something sacred, to that temper, that way of life, that universal spirit, which all, obscurely swayed by echoes of the old religion, had dumbly and shame-facedly recognized as in some sense divine. But they could not honestly blame their comrade for this error, if indeed error it was; for its source was the generous passion for the freeing of mankind from bondage. And for their own part the six were now deeply ashamed of their own past obtuseness to the world's ills, and to the meaning of the great pattern of events in which all their lives had occurred.

The revolutionary seventh, on his side, having now fully recognized the

personal reality of his six companions, looked with misgiving on many things in his own past, fearing that, in blind loyalty to the end, he had often, by lightly choosing evil means, done hurt to something without which the end, the true end, could never be achieved.

And so these disembodied seven, who in their former lives had scarcely ever given attention to the deeper questions, now entered perplexedly upon a philosophical discussion, if indeed such a name can be given to the strange direct interfusing of mind with mind which now swiftly brought them into accord.

Thus at last, through mutual insight, the community of the seven was restored and deepened. Each one of these diverse spirits, strangely born of the lives of seven young Englishmen, contributed his uniqueness to the common enrichment. And thus at last did their friendship find its consummation in intelligent love.

But in this final act of love the seven, as distinct beings, were doomed to attain not only their fulfilment but their end. For the upshot of this mystic fertilization of each by all was that all conceived within themselves co-operatively, or perhaps were gathered up into, a single spirit, which was the living identity of them all. Each with agony and terror but with overriding ecstasy was torn by strange death—or birth-throes. And out of this communal parturition, lethal to the seven, who now all fell headlong into nescience and non-entity, the single new-born spirit took wing.

New-born? Or newly awakened? Conceived perhaps much earlier in the seven's active comradeship, but hitherto somnolent, tranced, impotent, and now at last awake and free. Whatever the metaphysical truth of it, the seven now had died into an identical, more vital being, who was no one of them, nor yet the sum of them, but the heir of all their lives.

4. THE SPIRIT OF THE CREW

This being woke to find himself at first no more than the fragmentary, ephemeral and single-purposed spirit of a certain bomber crew.

Strange that the seven should be dissolved in a fellowship which, after all, had possessed them so superficially. Each of them had lived almost the whole of his life without any relation to the crew. Only in their final year, their last few months, had they been thrown together. Probably all of them, certainly some, had participated in associations far more expressive of their personal natures than the upstart and grimly simple crew. Yet now in death all died into that stark spirit. Seemingly the cause was that in the moment of death all were intensely concerned in the crew's united action. Moreover, only in the crew had they learnt to discipline their wills fully to a common purpose.

But indeed this simple spirit of a bomber crew was soon to discover in him-

self strange depths and heights of being. Brooding on the past lives of his seven members, he came to feel that, in some way still dark to him, he was in fact far more than the unity of those seven boys. As the sheer crew-spirit, he remembered those seven bodies as his own seven-fold body, though a body whose organs were often recalcitrant to the precariously enthroned common spirit. For each of his seven members had a life and a sentience and a will of his own. And each had a mentality far richer than the single-purposed spirit of the crew. Only in the air were they fully disciplined to the common will and to the fanatical simplicity of the common spirit. And even in the air they had remained seven individual minds, self-disciplined under a common loyalty.

But now, he who had emerged from the seven, felt that all the while he had been resident in each one of them, identical in each, though for the most part unconscious, deeply submerged, rising into clear perception and integral will only on those occasions when the crew's action was most single-purposed. When it was less so, when some of his members were keyed up for battle and some were reluctant, then it was he himself (so it now seemed to him) who goaded the faint-hearted ones into courage, as a man may goad his own tired muscles into the vigour of desperation.

Looking back, it seemed to him that not merely the seven but the very machine that imprisoned them had been part of his body. For through the seven's well-trained senses and through their instruments, and through their muscles and their mechanical controls, he lived the life of that composite being, biological and mechanical. As a man driving a car may feel the roughness of the road through the tyres, and the steepness of the hill through the straining engine, so he felt through those seven bodies and through the wings and air-screws and straining engines the very texture of the atmosphere, and the thrust and swoop of the plane. And as a man's will controls a car, so he, through the seven minds who were but organs of his own mind, controlled and fought the plane. Looking back into his past, it seemed to him that he had always since the crew's founding been present in each of his members as the identical will for efficient flying, efficient defence, efficient attack, and safe return. In the past he had participated only in the vaguest and most ineffectual manner in the personal lives of his members outside the aeroplane, outside the carapace of their common life in the crew. He knew them only in so far as they were intimate with each other. But now in their death and mutual insight he became fully possessed of all their experience.

In life, each one of them had been an individual boy fleetingly possessed by the crew's unity. Moreover each had been a member also of other communal beings. For each had shared in other groupings, in family, school, team, working gang and innumerable other less durable associations. Looking back into the earlier lives of the seven, the spirit of the crew told himself that in the time before ever they came together as a crew he could have had no part in any of them at all.

Indeed in those days, seemingly (though somehow he could not believe it) he had no being anywhere. And even later, in the time of the crew, one or other of his precious members was often possessed for a while by sheer self-concern, or by interest in some corporate being other than the crew. And indeed the young revolutionary, though of all the seven he had been the most self-disciplined to the crew in action, was also in his heart aloof, because dedicated ultimately to a loftier loyalty.

'But I, I, who am I?' questioned the crew's spirit. 'Am I really no more than the ephemeral community of the seven in whose lives I was conceived, and in whose death I discovered myself? And what future, if any, lies before me? In what world can I take action to express my nature more fully than my seven members could ever do?'

For as the crew's simple spirit brooded over the lives of his seven members, all their diverse individualities became absorbed into himself. His nature deepened to include the whole wealth of all their being.

Further, it seemed to him that, though his contact with the world was limited to the experience of his seven members, yet in some manner he was indeed far more than those seven. Though they were in a sense his parents, yet it now seemed to him most insistently that throughout all their lives, and not merely since the forming of the crew, he had always been present within each one of them, feeding on the diversity of the experience of those young human persons, and always an identical spirit in them all. But always, until their death, he had been a sleep-walker.

Nay more. It seemed to him that not only in the seven but in all those whom the seven had ever known, in their lovers, friends, colleagues, enemies, a spirit lived which, if only he could reach out to it, would prove to be himself, or, if not himself, then perhaps some more lucid spirit, that he, like all those others, strangely harboured.

Intently brooding on those seven lives, assessing the quality of their fumbling commerce with their fellow mortals and with the world, this being who seemingly had been born of the seven as the starkly simple spirit of their vivid community in action, now seemed to himself far older than the seven, seemed indeed primeval, perhaps eternal, seemed also to be of umplumbed depth, and subtlety. And now he was possessed by an obscure but passionate longing to be more fully, more lucidly himself, and to come into active commerce and communion with a world. As a sleeper may sometimes struggle vainly and in terror to spring from sleeping into waking, while his limbs remain paralysed, his eyes shut, and his mind crushed down as though under a great weight of water, so this being struggled to wake and be fully himself, and greet the unknown world, the great reality beyond himself.

5. THE COMPANY OF SOME WHO WERE KILLED

Suddenly the spirit of that crew with whom a moth had been imprisoned became aware of the cloudy moonlit sky and of the burning city, far below. The sirens were sounding to proclaim untranquil and unlasting peace.

He became aware also of a host of presences, bodiless like himself. It was as though a babel of voices deafened him with incoherent clamour; but these were in fact a swarm of spirits shifting, vanishing and reappearing, impinging directly upon his mind with violent conflict and intermittent sweet accord.

After a spell of bewilderment, he discovered that these beings with whom he was in such overwhelming contact were the spirits that had awakened in the final instants of all the killed in that battle, both in the air and on the ground. There were individual beings, and there were composite beings like himself. There were spirits emergent from those isolated killed who had not at the moment of death been deeply absorbed in the common life of any group; the spirits of particular airmen, firemen, soldiers, gunners, citizens. And there were those composite spirits that had awakened in the sudden destruction of whole close-knit crews of aeroplanes and anti-aircraft guns.

The spirit of that moth-accompanied crew found this new experience painful. The tumult and conflict of all these beings entered deeply into his own personality. For, under the stress of these new attractions and repulsions, one or other of his own seven members, who had seemed so well integrated into his own single being, would wake again into individuality and strain away from him. Indeed the whole company of spirits was a strange quivering flux, criss-crossed by ever-changing new patterns of individuality and communion. Individuals coalesced with one another or broke apart to merge themselves in new corporate beings, which might presently be once more disintegrated, or engulfed in greater beings.

An electron within an atom, they say, has no distinct individuality at all. It is a mere factor pervading the whole atom. So, equally, with these disembodied individual spirits, dissolved in corporate beings. But the electron may recover its individuality and leap free from the atom, to join perhaps with some other atom and once more die from individuality into a new corporate being. So also with these spirits. Or again electrons may become links binding atoms together in larger wholes of individuality. So also these spirits.

For instance, the revolutionary member of that crew which had died when a moth died now woke once more into individuality through the influence of other spirits of his temper. But so well had he been merged in the corporate being of his crew that, far from breaking away, he became the link by which the whole sevenfold spirit of that crew found community with all those among the killed who had willed a new world.

The individuals and corporate beings in this company of all the killed seethed like bubbles on the surface of boiling water, appearing, vanishing, merging, separating; or like the ever-shifting patterns of wrinkles on the skin of heated milk.

But one at least among those killed, being of far finer temper than the rest, had a different fate. Like all, she suffered annihilation of her earthly self; but since, even in her earthly self, she had been so little blinded by worldliness, the spirit which woke in her death could pass easily and swiftly through all the strange forms of being which most others must so laboriously climb.

She was a saint of the City. Born to luxury, but also to sincerity, and schooled in the best temper of the old religion, she had early broken with the easeful and gilded life of her own class. She looked for friendliness with the poor. For years they had rejected her; but in the end their hearts were won by her service and her need of them. When the tyranny broke upon the City, she with modest daring, and the formidable prestige of her integrity, had defended the persecuted and rescued the hunted.

Eagerly she reached always outward in friendliness and service; yet the source of all her warmth and strength lay in her inner life of contemplation. She praised the spirit in such forms as were known to her, in field and wood and sky, in human grace and the significance of human words, but above all in human loving. Not for her the subtleties, of the theologians, nor the equal subtleties of the sceptics. For her the perception of love's divinity, and the steep and excellent way.

When death destroyed her, then in virtue of her life's devotion the spirit that awoke in her dying soared on strong wings; until she seemed, she seemed, to be gathered up in exquisite communion with the very God whom all her life had praised. But her true and ultimate fate cannot yet fittingly be told.

This saint, alone among all the dead of that battle, sprang straight to bliss; or if not she, then the being that in her dying woke and struck free. Some few others, airmen, citizens and gunners, were gathered quickly into the common being of some church or party or other storied or passionate group. But most remained for long in tumultuous intercourse with their fellow dead.

This merging and union among the spirits of the killed was never painless. For although what drew the spirits into union was always some deep identity of will, yet also, no sooner were they forced into thorough and respiteless intimacy than in sudden revulsion they strained apart.

Agonizingly the massed experience of all these lives was thrust upon each spirit, so that at first their only wish was to avoid the intolerable stress of conflicting opinions and desires. For among these dead were young and old, men and women, masterful and submissive, simple and sophisticated, rich and poor, knaves and heroes and saints. Moreover there were the raiders and their enemies, the

attacking airmen and the citizens.

Not only were there antagonists from both sides of the battle, now tortured to find their minds poured together and subtly interfused with enemy minds, and their most sacred values spurned seemingly in the very sanctuary of their own souls; not only so, but worse, for there were many who, though on the same side of the battle, now with horror discovered one another to be at heart poles asunder in temper and ideals. For deeper far than the cleavage of the war was the difference between those who rendered ultimate allegiance to the very essence of spirit, to reason, love and creativity, and those whose hearts were secretly given mainly to personal or tribal power or to any other of the thousand phantasms that distract men. On both sides of the battle many simple spirits were in a confused way sincerely loyal to the light, and on both sides many were secretly wedded to darkness. But in the City the miasma of tribal doctrine grievously blinded even those who were for the spirit.

One thing alone, it seemed, the whole company of the spirits emergent from the killed had in common. All were the issue of lives cut short by violence. Unlike the members of a crew, no common purpose united them. Only death, violent and untimely, held them together as a single company.

But since all these beings, though hampered by the ignorances and prejudices of their mortal progenitors, were beings of lucid nature, their common tragedy of lives cut short was enough to form a stepping-stone to full mutual insight. Little by little, through what seemed to these spirits an age-long lifetime or remaking, though physically all happened within the spell of that brief battle, community triumphed over conflict. All came to appreciate under their many errors the identical truth in all.

Conflicts still perplexed them, but now only as differences among friends united in trust, and pressing eagerly toward full mutual insight.

Presently they cried out together, 'Had those poor mortals who generated us been able to see into one another's hearts and minds as we now see, strife would have been less Common on earth, happiness less rare. But we, possessing fully our common inheritance of experience, can create together a true fellowship of spirits, can be translated, each one of us, into the richer, ampler being of our union.'

But no sooner did they rise into this ecstasy of mutual insight than all felt themselves reeling, swooning, into unconsciousness. For in their communion they doomed themselves as individuals to extinction. Together they became the parents, or perhaps rather the midwives, of a single being. Each one of all this company died utterly, but his experience was gathered up into a single, ampler spirit, in whom they as conscious individuals had no part.

6. THE SPIRIT OF SOME WHO WERE KILLED

This spirit, who was born or who was wakened in the annihilation of all the heterogeneous company of the killed, possessed the pasts of all. He remembered, for instance, how a certain rear-gunner was kissed by a certain moth. And he remembered the composite spirit of that crew. He remembered through many brains the air-fleet's journey across the sea, and equally the preparations of the citizens for defence. The conflicts of will between citizens and attackers, between the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the forward-looking and the backward-yearning, he felt as conflicts between his own discordant moods, in the days before his waking into clear self-knowledge.

For it seemed to him that during the lives of his many members he had always been present in them all; though impotent, paralysed, sunk in a vast and incoherent dream. Always his members were divided from one another in location and in allegiance. And though in every one of them he had sometimes drowsily awakened and assumed precarious rule, never in those past lives had he, the loftier being, ruled for long.

'But I, I, what is it that I really am?' This question tormented him. 'If indeed I am no more than the spirit emergent in this night's killed, how comes it that I was alive in them before ever they were united in death? No! Though I possess the experience of this small company alone, I am indeed far more than their emergent spirit. I am that in all men which craves the light. Then why am I thus confined to a small company, and they all dead? Surely I am far more than the spirit of those few dead. I am the spirit of the dead of all lands and ages, and it is I that am immanent in all the living also. Always, in every generation since men first were men, I, I was the identical spirit in them. Then how comes it that I know nothing but those few ended lives?'

Through his experience of his dead members he now, chafing at the limitations and disabilities of those few, tried to form a clear view of the great world in which they had so briefly and so blindly lived. For though each of them had his unique world-view, none saw far, all saw crookedly. Vaguely therefore, the perplexed spirit of those killed pieced together from his members' experience a fragmentary and incoherent vision of the plight of mankind upon its little planet.

Vaguely he saw the nations summoning all their strength for war; vaguely the slaughter, the hate, the fear, the universal hunger for peace. And still more vaguely he was aware of the deeper crisis of our age, the crumbling of the old world, the painful birth of the new. Vaguely he saw that the perennial inner drama in each man's heart, the battle between darkness and the light, was in this moment of mankind's long life most crucial.

Surveying the fragmentary visions of his members, he was tormented by their inconsistency and triviality, and tantalized by the veiled and surmised fea-

tures of high truth; so that he cried, 'Blind and paralysed that I am, I must, must wake and be my whole self. I must possess all men. I must know the whole truth about mankind. I must be a power in all men's hearts. I must take action.'

Then suddenly the being who had emerged from those few killed mortals was assailed by the overwhelming onset of a crowding host of presences, by the individual minds of all who had been killed in this long war, and in the last war, and in all wars in all ages, and all who had died violent deaths in any way since man began, and all whose end had come by disease or sheer old age. And when the myriads of the dead had flooded upon him, there came at last the living, the two thousand million, white and black, yellow and brown, living their little various lives under the wide shadow of war. He knew them inwardly through their own experience, but also outwardly through their experience of each other. His consciousness widened to cover the whole field of human mentality; as an exploding star spreads its light-waves in an expanding sphere of illumination through the dark surrounding nebula. The massed experience of all living persons in all lands, fell upon him in an increasing cataract. But though he was compelled to be present in all these minds, he his very self remained distinct from them. They were voices sounding in his ears, not experiences of his own. Seemingly for a lifetime, an aeon, the cataract thundered upon him, while he battled to keep his identity afloat; yet all happened within the instant.

Piecemeal visions of the whole terrestrial globe, seen through two thousand millions pairs of eyes, inexorably assailed him; visions of night and day, of dreamlands and waking life, of tropical jungles and temperate champaigns and the planet's frozen extremities, visions of plains and hills and storms at sea, of remote crofts and shacks and homesteads, and of a thousand cities; visions of factory-work and tillage, of miners at the coal face and hunters in the northern forests, of company meetings and cathedral services; visions of war.

A babel of voices also resounded in his tortured mind, speaking in many languages, all of which were perfectly familiar to him, voices of American citizens discussing investments, of German gauleiters enforcing discipline, of Indian peasants imploring food, of Russian tractor drivers, Chinese students, and all the kinds and races of humanity. He heard inarticulate bellowings of hate, balanced sentences of persuasion and discussion, whispered instructions passed from soldier to soldier in ambush, and all the sweet and secret communications of lovers. Their embraces also he poignantly felt, in mansions and slums, on haystacks and in dark alleys. Through innumerable hands he felt the soft curves of human limbs, the textures of cloth and wood, and cold metal. Through a host of feet he felt the surface of the earth, the hot desert, the snowfields, the city pavements, the moors. Equally all the smells invaded him, of sweat and roses, corpses and sea breezes, of the hot tarmac and the cold smoke-laden fog, of spent explosives, dust, and blood and entrails. And all the flavours of all the foods and drinks, relished in

innumerable mouths and swallowed down the world-population of gullets. He was assailed also by those expulsions which take place every day in every land, whether in immaculate closets or stinking latrines or behind hedges or in the open desert. And those other, those honoured expulsions too he felt, all the birth-pangs of that moment, of young mothers tom and frightened, and mothers old and tired; births sealed by death, and births easy as an animal's.

Not only the physical perceptions of all human sense-organs but also the longings and fears and busy thoughts of all human minds were forced upon him; their inveterate self-cherishing, their self-sacrifice for ends great or petty, their myriad reasonings, in search of profit or of divinity.

And with this he was aware of the corporate and tenuous spirits emergent in all human associations, from the long-lived but nebulous individualities of nations, churches, social classes, to the brief ardent spirits of aircraft crews, of little ships, of party cells, and the intense communions of lovers. He was confronted also with the one-track minds emergent in innumerable special societies, in business firms, professional associations, trade unions, philanthropic associations, little chapels, churches, clubs, and the juvenile spirits of schools and colleges, wrapped in their cocoons of tradition or straining for new growth. The cosmopolitan, but in war-time sadly disintegrated, mind emergent in all pioneering men of science in all the warring lands was also present to him; and the thousand exploring or merely repetitive mentalities of cultural cliques, 'movements', religious fanaticisms, social policies:

The spirit of those killed was now confronted also with those rare and holy individuals, like the City's dead saint, who through intensity of contemplation and integrity of action had become more nearly pure spirit than human individual. These he recognized as beings more lucid than himself. He strained against them, recalcitrant to their excellence; yet at the same time he longed to rise to them and include their clearer nature within himself.

7. DEATH OF THE SPIRIT OF THE KILLED

Reeling with the impact of all this voluminous and inconsistent experience, the being who had emerged from the killed in a certain battle over a certain city was torn between the desperate need to preserve his identity, and the longing to assimilate all this wealth of experience, and find communion with all these diverse spirits, individual and corporate. Exclusiveness and love struggled within him. For, in contemplating all this host, how could he not feel for them a deep compassion and kinship and yearning? But also, because they threatened his individuality, they were repugnant to him. Again and again he had to remind himself that fellowship and not self-cherishing is the way to the larger life. At last, after how long a struggle, he flung down all his defences and welcomed the in-

vaders.

'All you great cloud of beings,' he cried, 'though we are separate, surely also we are one. In our inmost being we are one. Under our severalty and our idiosyncrasy, we are identical, we are Man.'

But no sooner had he passionately affirmed his unity with that host of others, than a fog of darkness and of oblivion surged against him. Struggling to retain consciousness, he felt himself disintegrating, evaporating, under some powerful influence, as a dewdrop when the sun devours it. Presently he, as an individual being, the transient spirit that had emerged in those few killed, was extinguished. He died into the great spirit of Man.

8. SECOND INTERLUDE: THE HEART OF IT

You! Most single and singular, whom I love best! Even you are in fact immensely remote from me, you dear centre of an alien universe. Though you are the most near of all things, you are also sometimes perplexingly remote. Over how many decades have we been growing together in a joyful, a life-giving, an indissoluble symbiosis! Yet even now, sometimes I have no idea what you are feeling or thinking. You are apt for action, I for contemplation; you for responding to the minute particular that claims your service, I (Oh fatally) for the universal and the far-flung. Although our minds do indeed most often move in a common rhythm, like a close-dancing couple, yet sometimes we are at arm's length, or we break step, or we fly apart, cleft by some sudden discord. How many times have I said to you, 'Quick, there is a train to catch', and you have answered, 'There is plenty of time'; or I, 'Now we are too late', and you, 'The train may be later'. Even in Hell you would be an optimist. But in the end, of course, through some black magic which you are forced to use on such occasions, the train is caught, and we sit together silent, waiting for it to start. Again and again our diversity hurts, it even infuriates,' but it does not really matter. Indeed in the end it is an enrichment, a painful but In the end a welcome partiapation of each in the uniqueness of the other.

Even in that most sharp discordancy of all, did we not become more real to one another? In the end we have grown together more closely. We know one another the better for it; we love one another the better. We are more intimately and indissolubly 'we'.

Of course each of us is still 'I', and the other is 'you', the far centre of an alien universe,' but increasingly, and now indestructibly, the two of us together are also 'we', the single, though two-minded centre of a universe common to both of us. We see the world together. No longer does each of us look at it merely in solitariness, with single vision, seeing it as a fiat picture. We perceive it now in depth, stereoscopically. With our common binocular vision each regards all things from

our two alien viewpoints.

Our distinctness is as precious as our unity, and our unity as our distinctness. Without deep harmony, in our roots and our flowers, how could we hold together? But without our difference, how kindle one another?

Nothing in my world is identical with anything in yours. Not a tree, not a word, not a person. Is redness, even, to me just I what it is to you?

Probably it is much the same, for we are similar organisms; but perhaps, (who knows?) your 'red' is what I call 'green'. What matter? Such a difference would be eternally insignificant for us, since it would be for ever indiscernible. But justice, beauty, truth and a good joke have meanings that we can share with one another, and are discovered to be never identical for the two of us. And though we have friends in common, they are never quite the same persons. Though the friends of each are the friends of both, yet also and inevitably the friend, the lover, of one is the other's possible antagonist. These our differences, that haunt us elusively at every turn, or step suddenly forward and bar the way with fire, cannot without disaster be ignored. Blind love is no love at all.

We are indeed for ever separate, for ever different, for ever in some measure discordant; but with a discordancy ever more harmonized in the 'we' that is for each of us so much more than 'I' yes, and perhaps even than 'you'. As centres of awareness we remain eternally distinct… but in participation in our 'we', each 'I' wakens to be an ampler, richer' I', whose treasure is not 'myself' but 'we'. And so 'I' without 'you' am a mere torn-off ragged thing, a half-blinded crippled thing, a mere phantom whose embodiment is only in 'us'.

This precious 'we' that we have conceived together, this close-knit unity in difference, this co-habitation and communion of two spirits, will not for ever exfoliate on this planet. Soon or late, one or other of us will die. Then 'we', no doubt, will live on for a while in the survivor, as a cherished but a growthless thing. When both are dead, it will vanish from this world. And then? Surely it is incredible that 'we' should have no further being.

Yes, but the incredible has often happened.

Dread, and to us inscrutable, are the dark ways of dark God.

Chapter 3 THE SPIRIT OF MAN SURVEYS HIS PAST

1. THE SPIRIT OF MAN AND HIS MEMBERS

That essence which is indeed the universal spirit of Man, identical in all human individuals, survived the extinction of the transient being which had emerged in those few killed. Gravely he had watched those men and women die. Feeling their pain and sorrow as in a way his own, he yet held himself aloof from it; much as a man may feel the hurt of a cut finger or a barked knuckle and yet carry on with his work.

The spirit of Man did not now for the first time wake. He had all the while been awake and aware in all the two thousand million living individuals that composed his living flesh; and equally in every moment of mankind's long life-time he had been aware in the living population of the world. And in all the tenuous and fragmentary corporate beings, brief or lasting, that were emergent in human associations, the age-old spirit of Man had always been aware. He knew them not only as individual spirits distinct from himself but also as though they were sentiments and ideas of his own mind; as a man may know the interests and whims, the passions and high purposes, that jostle one another within him.

The spirit of Man confronted the City's dead saint, and all the saints of all lands. These appeared to him not as something alien and lofty to which he could not attain, but as most truly and inwardly his very self; though often they were confused by doctrines which he, wise with all human wisdom, saw to be false. In spite of their errors, these angelic beings were at heart indeed himself; the more so for their inveterate yearning beyond him, beyond his mere humanity to some spirit purer and more Godlike. For this yearning was his own. And in the beatitude that these rare beings reached in seeming union with their Gods, he too found bliss. But his was a dumb and uninterpreted bliss. Not for him their little myths. To him their joy was rather a foretaste of strange joy still to be found; but never, perhaps, explained. For he knew well that the intelligence of no man, nor even of the essential spirit of Man, could solve high mystery.

The spirit of Man, unlike that lesser, transient spirit emergent in the killed of a certain battle, was not confused and nauseated by the welter of human experience. Perceiving through all men's sense organs, he fused without effort all their perceptions into a single orderly perception. Thus, fingering the earth through swarms of little human feet, and watching it through hosts of little human eyes, he felt and saw his planet as a variegated sphere of lands and seas, of tropic, temperate and arctic.

And from this globe, on which his multiple body was a sparse and creeping vital dust, he now, as on many other occasions, looked wonderingly outwards through men's eyes and telescopes to consider his location and prospects among the planets, among the stars and galaxies. 'When I am full-grown', he dreamed, 'and not the fledgeling that I am, and not racked by the distemper which to-day distresses me, perhaps—' But then the hugeness of the cosmos, beside the minuteness of his own bodily instrument, silenced his imagination. 'I am so little,' he murmured, 'so young, so ignorant and weak; and so distorted by these fierce convulsions of my flesh. What part can such as I play ever among the stars?'

A persistent eagerness for he knew not what, a restlessness to exert some hidden potency that he could not yet conceive, impelled him again and again to look outward at the stars, in a conflict of exaltation and abasement. But in the main

his interest was with his immediate fortunes, and so with his little planet and all his tingling multiple flesh, mankind. His flesh? In a way, yes, his multi-cellular flesh. And yet his own unified awareness of his individual members was very different from a man's obscure consciousness of his body's cells. For he could at will concentrate his attention on anyone of those minute personalities. They were for him at once persons into whose minds he had access and also parts within his own physique and mentality. For the personal lives of the great host of his members were fused into a single epic theme, which was the groundwork of his own being.

For him the whole ocean of human experience, far from being a chaos, formed a single clear though often self-conflicting pattern of his own self-knowledge and knowledge of the world. To a man at sea-level the waves may seem disorderly; but from an aeroplane he may observe that they are in fact well-ordered ranks, a number of drilled processions and regiments moving in many directions across each other's tracks, interpenetrating without losing their identity, reflected here and there from bays and promontories and distant coasts, disturbing each drop of the water with the summation of all their rhythms; but in some regions one wave-train and in some another dominates the rest. So, but with far greater complexity, the mental field composed of all human individuals was seen and felt by the spirit of Man to be traversed by many prevailing trends of thought and purpose, while ephemeral zephyrs flurried now one region and now another of the human sea with fleeting catspaws of passion and of fashion.

In respect, for example, of the many vocations of human beings the great spirit of Man felt innumerable special modes of mentality imposed by circumstance on the common human nature and the personal idiosyncrasies of men and women. Peasants, though infinitely diverse, were mainly peasant-minded, thrifty, patient, rich in country-lore; and superstitious. Wage-slaves in industry mainly lived for their brief hours of leisure. Like seedlings in barren ground their roots were starved; yet many put forth poor gallant starveling blooms of love. The minds of financiers were woven largely of figures and the abstractions of the money-market. They were strangely obtuse to the repercussions of their fiats on the lives of men and women. And yet they too were personal spirits, capable of loving. In physicians' minds awareness of the human body's intricacies and manifold disorders bulked overwhelmingly. For sailors the world was mainly water; for miners, tunnels.

There was one mode of experience which the spirit of Man felt as a character of the whole field of human mentality, here faint and there obtrusive, here obsessing the spotlight of consciousness, there a secret but powerful influence in the unwitting depths of the personality. All the little human creatures craved, frankly or under a cloak of revulsion, intimate bodily contact with some other of their kind, either in the normal union of the sexes or in some eccentric manner. The importunacy of this hunger, though rigorously restrained by convention, toned

every feeling, every thought, of the spirit of Man's individual members; toned also his own mentality, with an Adonis-like self-delight, a sweet mysterious, bi-sexual, hermaphrodite, sensual and spiritual passion, inconceivable to human individuals. Thus the spirit of Man enjoyed the beauty of all well-grown men and women, by perceiving them through the loving eyes of all their lovers. Not only the spiritual communion but also the physical delight of all lovers in one another was his treasure.

But in all this experience of beauty and of love, as in so much of his experience, he was distressfully aware of a widespread malaise and sickness in his flesh. The beauty of his members, exquisite here and there, was for the most part marred, disfigured. Starvation, disease, overstrain, and all kinds of disharmony with the world and with each other, blighted most of them, and oppressed the spirit of Man himself with the jaundice of his flesh. And so, he remembered, it had been for many thousands of years.

In each of his members he, his very self, was ever the spirit that craved understanding, wisdom, community, love, beauty and creativity; but in nearly all the little human creatures, this spirit was eternally frustrated by a pest of stupidities, hates, ugliness, and all manner of betrayals. And everywhere there was fear; not only the urgent fears of war but of death in every form, of incurable diseases, of poverty, of disgrace, of the loss of the beloved. And all the self-regarding fears of human beings were felt by the loftier being that was Man, felt with full poignancy; yet also with detachment. For these minute ephemeral beings, though indeed they were his flesh, were not he, himself. Their unhealthiness was indeed oppressive to him, because it was an unhealthiness in his own body lowering his vitality, and confusing his mind; but the sorrows of those spirits were not in themselves his sorrows. Though he experienced them from within, he experienced them with detachment.

Yet, most strangely, this detachment was not the whole of his feeling toward them. Just because they were all in their diverse ways persons, self-aware and other-aware, his own mere self-concern in their joys and pains was strangely mingled with the respect and compassion, yes and the love, due between all personal beings, no matter how remote from one another in the hierarchy of personality. A man cannot love his little brain-cells, for he has no acquaintance with them, and they are not persons; but the spirit of Man, knowing men inwardly, and knowing them as persons, needs must love them with such love as is their due. He loved them for being at once identical with himself and other than himself; identical in their groping will for the light, other in their littleness, their diversity, their frailty, and their mortality.

Moreover they and he were bound together in a strange mutual dependence. He, without them could have no footing in the world, perhaps no being;

and they without him, constantly active within them, would be mere sub-human beasts. Without them, love would be for him inconceivable, for only in their severalty could love be. Yet without him in their hearts they could never love; for they could never be truly aware of one another as spirits, and as inwardly united. Through the unity of himself and his members, fellowship and even loving mutual insight were rhythms which pervaded, though unsurely, the whole human field. Only here and there, of course, did love blossom fully, only among serene or life-long lovers, and in the few inspired lovers of mankind or of the very spirit of Man himself, or of some imagined God.

Because of love's unfulfilment in his members, he himself was maimed, paralysed by their discordancy, and confused by their conflicting fantasies.

Particularly in this age of violence the spirit of Man was tormented by the convulsions of his flesh. He was oppressively aware throughout nearly all his peoples of the rending spasm and the harsh fatigue of warfare. Only in the deepest jungle and in the snow-huts of the Arctic were men wholly free from war's effects. Everywhere else the slaughter and the fear and the strain weighed upon them, even if only as a vague shadow cast upon a normal life. And to some the war brought a black-out darkness of the spirit, though a darkness shot with flashes of much-needed pleasure or the pale light of hoped-for dawn. Everywhere, save among a few born warriors and a few strategists poring over the chessboard of war, and among those who made profit out of the urgency of war's needs, the spirit of Man felt the unison vibration of men's yearning for peace; though most were also fearful of what peace might bring. And in many great regions of the human field men, and women also, were crushed and annihilated by war's fierce impact.

Though to his members the war was a prolonged gloom and misery, to him it seemed a brief though violent contortion of his body, paralysing his mind. He knew it as the climax of a long-suppressed disease. His organs, long discordant, were now divided against themselves in crazy conflict. And though he could not but will victory to the side which was on the whole for the light, and not to the other side, which was blindly astray, yet his sympathies were divided; for on both sides, though in unequal extent, there were men and women who were blunderingly obedient to his will; and on both sides were cancerous and rebellious growths. And every day swarms of his individual members, the precious cells of his flesh, the vessels and instruments of his essential being, suffered destruction or hideous maiming. Everywhere young minds, the only vehicle for a glorious change that had seemed imminent in him, were being squandered. With this huge killing of the young the tone of all his tissues must surely turn predominantly old. And he himself, whose million years were but a childhood, might well become in temper prematurely senile. Indeed, if men's mutual destruction were not restrained, the race might destroy itself, and he, the spirit of Man, who was still so

juvenile, and full of promise of great and glorious change, might prematurely end.

Glorious change! Cutting across all the pervading wave-trains and local flurries of human mentality the spirit of Man felt two strong conflicting wills in every region, in every mind. They thrust against one another as opposing waves meet on a tormented lake with violent pulse and throb of their conflicting rhythms. From one direction the minds of men were all stirred by a yearning for the womb, for easy bliss, for safety, for the familiar order with its known ills and known opportunities. From the other they were moved by a longing for new horizons and greater scope for their vitality, and by discontent with the existing pattern of human life. Indignation fired them because of the misery of their own lives or their fellows'. Here and there they rose even to a passion for the flowering of the human spirit, and therefore for a new-born world which alone could support that flowering. He saw that, though this internecine conflict had racked him always, now, in this tense moment, it was most severe, most urgent. For in some way that was still dark to him this moment of his life was felt as crucial. Something strange, unprecedented, dangerous, was causing a new restlessness, a ferment, throughout his flesh. Was this fever merely the climax of his familiar, long-suppressed disease, or could it be the stress and tumult preluding some vast remaking, some rebirth into a creature more subtle and more vital?

2. THE CHILDHOOD OF MAN

For so many centuries, for many centuries of millennia, the spirit of Man had been toilfully, painfully clarifying his purpose. At first, how slowly!

He looked back into the deep vista of his past. The historical and prehistorical ages of humanity crowded his t memory. As a man may peer back into his youth, and even into the mists of his infancy, so the spirit of Man reviewed his life. Every phase of his whole past lay open to him. And at the earliest point of all he saw the first of his remembered ages knotted into the dark womb of his subhuman ancestry. Out of that darkness he had sprung to life as a certain individual fully human infant, a male child, the first true human being, offspring of subhuman parents. By whatever mutation of genes he had been created, there he was, the I. one bright individuality in a certain almost human but still subhuman family, the one twinkling star of half-lucidity in the dark world of the subhuman. And he himself was in appearance scarcely distinguishable from his subhuman kin. Only in his half-lucid spirit was he man.

In this forefather of us all the spirit of Man first breathed. And well he remembered how In this his first germ cell he slowly wakened and slowly discovered his uniqueness. For this father Adam of all human beings had painfully to find himself. Loving his subhuman mother for her animal affection, he loathed her for her obtuseness to his human needs. Accepting his brothers and sisters for

their companionableness, he despised them for their stupidity. Soon, though the youngest, he became the master of them all. And then in youth and maturity he was the genius, the medicine man, the tyrant, of his subhuman tribe. Timorous yet arrogant, revered but hated, maddened by loneliness, without speech or the support of any human tradition, the first true man was so hampered by his subhuman nurture that to the spirit of Man, looking back on him from a future time, he seemed scarcely human. Yet, though by upbringing a mere subman, ignorant, inarticulate, bewildered, teased by his own unfulfilled humanity, he was by native capacity fully human. A man by nature, but by nurture almost a beast. He accepted the simple customs of the submen, and was content to beat them at their own simple game. But the spirit of Man, reviewing the first man's life, remembered occasions when, in unfamiliar torment of self-consciousness, he had fluttered impotently, mothlike, against the shut windows of his nature, and how, in his dealings with companions and his sexual mate, he had craved what could never be given, what he himself could never conceive, personal awareness and true love.

How far, how very far, had the spirit of Man travelled, since he was that Adam! Now, at least he knew clearly what his nature was. And that knowledge, in spite of all his errors, was a constant light. Yes! But his members? When he compared his present members with Adam, he saw that by far the most of them were scarcely more lucid. There was a certain rear-gunner, for instance, who, in spite of all the prophets and philosophers through all the ages, knew scarcely better than the first man what his nature needed. Of love he had little more understanding than Adam in his subhuman world; of wisdom, in spite of his smattering of science, rather less; and of creative action, less, far less.

Among Adam's offspring some had been clear-minded like himself; and among them, as comrades or incestuous mates, human loving had first begun.

When at last that Father Adam had died, when the first truly human self was annihilated, the spirit of Man had disengaged himself from that ephemeral being, and wakened into clearer but still halting insight into his own and Adam's nature; as, long afterwards, in the death of a certain rear-gunner, a more lucid spirit had awakened. Though still imprisoned within the limits of poor Adam's knowledge, he was not enslaved, like Adam, to Adam's greeds and fears. And he was sensitive to all the subtlest features of that bewildered mind's experience, as Adam himself could never be. And so, already, though darkly and without the winged vehicle of language, he felt, but could not clearly conceive, that his main concern must ever be to know, to love, to make.

The spirit of Man, peering back into the ages of his long infancy, saw Adam's descendants slowly win mastery over their tribe of submen.

And always the first true men had lived mainly as submen, though ruling those poor half-human cattle; and sometimes, teased by the strange spark within

them, men groped for more human living. How dark, how fog-bound had been their minds! And yet, because these his first members had been indeed part-lucid, like all subsequent men, and not wholly unseeing like the submen, already the more sensitive among them were obscurely loyal to him; already he was alive in them, a spark disturbing them; but only with spasmodic intuitions, gleams of understanding, flashes of mutual insight, only with passing miracles of clear love, or wisdom, and short, precarious flights of divine creating. Our earliest human forefathers were no less human inwardly than men today, no less aware, intelligent, and apt for love; but they lacked the long treasure of experience yet to be gathered and scrutinized by the thousands of generations. And lacking this, they lacked judgment and clear human purpose. And he too, the spirit of Man, in his far-off infancy, lacked judgment; and though already his purpose was the essential human purpose, it was imprecise, not rigorously conceived, not even constant. For not yet, not in that earliest age of man, could there be, even for the spirit of Man, any clear vision of the way.

The millennia of his infancy succeeded one another as the weeks of a child's life. His members multiplied. They spread into every land, a sparse, percipient vital dust on Earth's vast skin. He remembered, as his own hard-won prowess, how they learned and lost and learned again the skills and lore that were the earliest human tradition. Above all he savoured his memories of the first halting speech; recalling how, out of familiar grunts and cries in familiar situations, significance had slowly emerged. He remembered too, as his own most distinctive strokes of insight, the acts of the early geniuses who had first used stones as missiles or as hammers, first shaped a flint, first seized a flaming brand from the bushfire to tame and use the bright, biting creature; first tamed a dog, a horse; first turned the rolled log into a wheel. He remembered also how they had passed from continent to continent, storm-driven in their canoes. It was he, his very self, too (how he remembered it!), who, through the minds of early medicine men, had first used marks as signs; and he who first led them to symbolize their hungers; and their aspirations by drawings on cave walls and by rhythmic incantations. And he had made them find in the growing subtlety of gesture and of intonation, and later in dance and song, in sculpture and painting, the means to quicken their consciousness of self and other, and of the dread and lovely world. He again it was who teased them with an itch for understanding; so that, in haste for satisfaction, they childishly explained the universe in terms of their own hunting lore or peasant wisdom.

In short it was he who had always (so at least it seemed to him) been the lucid though often misguided spirit in them, forcing them to conceive and then abandon illusion after illusion. Yes, it was he, the spirit of Man, who had done all this; and yet he was nothing but his little members themselves in their highest reach of percipience and integrity, united as a single mind.

3. EDEN AND THE FALL

Ten thousand centuries after his birth from the womb of the subhuman, in fact in the full bloom of his childhood, when generations of hunters, fishers, pickers of wild fruits and herbs, and the nomadic herdsmen, and finally the settled farmers, had played their parts in weaving the long tapestry of early culture, then, ah then, there came a happy age. The spirit of Man remembered how at that time he was a small, clear, constant flame in every heart, fostered by a strong though but half-conscious custom of reason and friendliness. Men lived in Eden, and in innocence. War was not, and violence between man and man was a private madness only. The families of hunters or herdsmen, and the companies of communal farmers, were each unified by a common purpose and by comradeship in work. Each family was a close-knit crew, fretted no doubt with conflicts and jealousies, but rooted in mutual acceptance; and far more deeply rooted than the ephemeral crew of ship or aeroplane could ever be. And because of this wholesomeness of the social tissue of mankind, this age was the bright phase which, ever after, tradition would enshrine and glorify as the Golden Age. The spirit of Man, looking back in perplexity from this tortuous age of ours, reviewed in memory that long-past candour of his members, and sighed. Crowning that bliss, came the first cities, each set in its own wide cornland, and each the seed-plot of a new elegance and subtlety of mind. And all was weaponless. And lords and kings were only leaders among brothers. All men took care for all.

But presently, through the land-hunger of the swelling cities, and their rivalry in splendour, empires had risen, knit by arms. And often remote barbarian tribes, greedy for wealth and power, had overrun whole civilizations. And all the while the hosts of little farms, once worked by free comradely yeomen, were welded into great estates, where gangs of slaves were forced to labour for the lords who owned them.

The spirit of Man, looking back on this phase in his childhood, saw that this was the time of his first undoing. Some secret poison had crept into his flesh to start the smouldering cancer that was to rack him throughout his life. Before that age, men's greed had been tempered by their unquestioned custom of brotherhood. Opportunities for mastery had been slight, and censure powerful. But in the new affluence of the cities, new dazzling prizes enticed men. And since all men were spellbound by this glamour, censure of arrogance and self-seeking lost its power; save among slaves, and what matter the censure of slaves? And what authority, anyhow, the masters demanded, was there for censure? Merely the dying prestige of the blind and outworn custom of the tribal age that had passed. Now, new ambitions charmed men. New moralities whispered plausibly in their hearts. Wealth and military power and imperial majesty demanded the allegiance of all

men.

The spirit of Man remembered that even he himself had been misled by the new specious values. For in the earlier, golden age his multiple body had been a disorderly swarm of little tribes, but now it was becoming orderly; and so it seemed to him that the order of the whole was worth the sacrifice of some. For order promised new power to his limbs. Organized into great states, and into heirarchies of social classes, his multiple body (he believed) could develop new sensitive organs and new creative skills. In the new cities some men, saved from toil by the toiling masses, could give their whole minds to the problems of the spirit, the problem of man's nature and his destiny. And so it had seemed even to the spirit of Man himself that the new order opened new reaches of the long way of life; even though hosts of his individual members, born to be persons, were doomed by the new order to become slaves, mere units of the great machine.

Remembering his folly, he cried, 'What fiend, what power of outer darkness, was it that crept into every tissue of my flesh, and even into my inmost self? Or what inherent weakness in me was it that then undid me?'

He watched the hosts of labourers, their spirits maimed, tilling the stubborn ground with inadequate tools, to keep the rich in affluence; or being driven in gangs to carry great stones for the building of temples for the priests, and palaces and tombs for the kings. In each suffering individual slave of all these millions, generation upon generation, the spirit of Man was himself present. He saw each child denied its human birthright; its promise of human happiness broken by toil and harshness. He was alive, too, in the minds of the privileged, who should have become the peculiar instruments of his own awakening mentality; but in them he found for the most part obsession with luxury or personal glory, and dreams of immortality. He watched them conceive a thousand myths of a life hereafter, and consecrate half their energy and the labour of innumerable slaves to securing comfort for themselves in the other world.

Reviewing those millennia of his late childhood, the spirit of Man saw man's power constantly increase. Cities grew more splendid, empires vaster, armies more cunningly equipped, handicrafts more apt and lavish. But the cost was the sweat, and often the blood, of innumerable slaves. And to the privileged it seemed natural and right that this should be so, for the comradely custom of the ancient tribes was forgotten. And though between lovers and between friends and in working gangs love might often emerge, the steel threads that knit society were no longer comradeship but power. And again, though the brighter minds were stirred by curiosity about the secret nature of the universe, they still assuaged that itch merely by fantasy, by wishful fantasy. They could not yet see clearly what thinking was, nor what the ceiling of its flight. Neither love nor reason was a constant star to guide.

The spirit of Man recalled how, in that phase of his life, even he himself had strayed from the way which in the Golden Age he had already half-conceived. In this age of slaves and empires the sickness of his flesh had clouded his wit and obscured his feeling. He was like a man whose mind wanders in fever. And the new lure of power was one of the dream visions that confused him. But now and then, here and there, even in this dark phase, he had recovered lucidity; and in the mind of some unheeded prophet or humble slave he had declared, though vainly, some facet of the truth.

4. THE AGE OF THE PROPHETS

Shifting now the searchlight of his memory to the next movement of his life, the spirit of Man recalled his sudden waking, as it were, from childhood to adolescence.

Tormented by the distress of the swarming workers and the futility of the privileged, and frightened at his own delirium, he, the spirit of Man, had at last put forth the whole strength of his will to wake again and more fully into such percipience as was possible to him, and to wrestle as never before with the problem of his own nature, and of his relation to his members and to the whole universe beyond him.

Through his recent centuries of sickness he had conceived health more clearly. Through participation in a great evil he had more urgently perceived the good. Of the follies that beset his members, some he could easily avoid, others not. Never had he been tempted to suppose that the triumph of one particular empire or potentate or noble caste or priestly class or creed was in itself of any importance. As well might a man be loyal to his right hand against his left. Nor did it ever seem to him desirable or credible that little human individuals should have eternal life. Too well he knew their littleness, their triviality. Too often, indeed in every death, he himself had struck free from the drowning individual spirit and watched it suffer extinction. But in men's internecine struggles for power and empire he saw the promise of world order, and for himself theocratic dictatorship over all his flesh. Spellbound by this hope, he had overlooked the degradation of his members in slavery. But never again, no never again, would he persuade himself that in their degradation he himself could thrive; or that, while the many suffered, his work could be carried on by an unheeding few.

Something more was also borne in on him. Since all his little members, though so minute and so crippled, were of stature personal, he recognized that in permitting their degradation he had not only harmed his own flesh and dulled his own mentality; he had sinned. And this recognition of his sin had been a new and terrible and enlightening experience for the spirit of Man. He discovered that, in some way not yet clear to him, he was under obligation to respect and foster the

life of personal spirits of whatever order. With shame and remorse he confessed to himself, 'Even if slavery and empire had indeed been the way for my advancement, yet I ought to have rejected them. In accepting them I sinned against something deep within me that was at once my essential self yet also somehow far greater than myself.'

In mental agony he cried, 'I, the spirit of Man, have sinned against the Spirit'. And in that spontaneous cry he recognized for the first time that he, even he, the spirit of Man, was not a law unto himself, not the ultimate rightful arbiter of his own conduct, not the measure of all things. But what power, what divinity, could it be that thus mastered him?

Looking back to that dread discovery, and that unanswered question, after thousands of years had passed, he remembered well how, when he had suffered this half-enlightenment, he had gazed outward from his planet, through the eyes of Egyptians, Babylonians, Indians, and the remote Chinese, and the isolated, and still savage Americans. Through these scattered human eyes he had contemplated the joined hemispheres of night and day. Of the true nature of sun and stars he still knew nothing, but knew that he knew nothing. He knew neither that they were mere balls of fire, nor that they were immense, and engulfed in inconceivable immensity. But in the passion of his repentance it seemed to him that the surrounding dark-bright sphere was alive, was spirit like himself, but greater; and that all its luminaries were flashing eyes, and angry. .

Looking back from our latter day across the gulf of centuries the spirit of Man tasted once more the bitter blood-guilt of his youthful sin, and seemed to see once more the flashing anger of the heavens. And yet surely that sin was expiated. For had he not inwardly lived through and suffered, generation after generation, all the sorrows of the downtrodden? And had not compassion tormented him?

In his childhood's remorse he had wondered what he could do to wipe out his sin, to overthrow the tyranny that he had permitted, and thereby to heal his sickly flesh and purge his erring will.

At last with innocent hopefulness he had resolved upon a twofold plan. Strengthening his own will with earnest contemplation, and searching with new insight and reverence the groping spirits of his saints, he would more forcibly than ever make his presence felt in the minds of all men and women. And also he would choose out some, the most aware of all his members, to be peculiar vessels of the light. These should become self-consecrated instruments of his new chastened purpose. They should influence all men, both humble and powerful, like master cells controlling the growth of tissues. They should so work upon men's minds that all men would henceforth gladly dedicate themselves to the great cause that he and they together served. And so tyranny would be forsworn. Thus the

cancerous tumours that were destroying his flesh would melt away, and his flesh would be once more wholesome.

This plan he had vigorously executed. With redoubled strength, born of his new passion, he had stirred the minds of all men and women in every land, so that all yearned, though still obscurely, for new life. At the same time he had chosen out his prophets, the many lesser and the few great, to explore the truth, and to preach it. Thus was it that within a span of a few centuries the leading peoples had conceived those high visions which were to hold all men till the age that we call modern.

Looking back at that time of youthful hope across the centuries of disillusion, the spirit of Man smiled and sighed. To suppose that so easily the enemy could be defeated, the fiend exorcized!

But it had been a gallant venture. In land after land prophet after prophet had preached some partial aspect of the truth. And the hearts of the peoples took fire. The prophets had spoken each in the language of his own people, and they had shaped their message according to the concepts of their age. And so, even in their own minds, the truth that each had felt was shot through with error. Accepting the old gods and the old taboos, they strove to purify them in the light of the flame which the spirit of Man had kindled in them. But, being creatures of their age, they could not abandon the old images wholly to the flame.

In the East a young man of royal birth, shielded from the truth by luxury and pomp, went out to find how the common people lived. Penury, disease and sorrow everywhere confronted him. And all men were enslaved to their distresses, as he himself had been enslaved to his pleasures and his royal style. Neither in personal triumph, he discovered, nor in the frustration of cherished desires could men find peace. The spirit of Man moved him to consecrate his life wholly to seeking out the way of peace, the way of reality, for his fellow mortals. Forswearing for ever the pleasures and I glories of the favoured individual triumphing in the world, this prophet set out to free himself wholly from desire, save the one desire, to surrender his will and destroy his individual self utterly and be dissipated into the spirit not of man merely but of the cosmos. For the individual selves of men, with their enthralling pleasures and their torturing woes seemed to him to be phantoms only, moments of the universal sprit, real-seeming to themselves merely because of their strange isolation and privation from the universal. To find his reality in the whole, a man must deny himself utterly, must kill his individuality. So long as he remained in the world, he must use himself wholly in service of his fellows; yet even toward them he must remain always detached, caring at heart only that he and they should travel along their destined ways toward the ultimate dissolution of their finite selves in the universal Spirit.

Other great prophets in the East described more minutely the Way by which

alone men might hope to escape from their littleness and their enslavement, the Way of reasonableness, forbearance, mutual respect and self-detachment.

But in the West another, apostle of truth, lover of wisdom, strove above all to clarify men's thinking, by patient questioning; and to show that the way of reason also must lead a man to stand outside himself, and see himself wholly as one among his fellow mortals. He affirmed that to favour oneself against another was to be false to reason, and that the right goal for each man was to express the essential spirit of Man in the integrity of his own life.

Another, between East and West, schooled in his people's vision of the one almighty creator, the law-giver, the just and jealous God, most high, most dread and holy, found in his own heart-searching another and a nobler gospel. He saw that all his fellows were deep in sin. They lied and cheated and drove hard bargains. They were heartless toward one another. And above all the rich used their power not to free the poor from poverty but to keep them enslaved. All, all, in a thousand ways, sinned constantly against the spirit. And yet also they loved. And love was their salvation. The prophet in his own daily living had found that in fact men were inevitably members one of another, and that only in mutual insight and friendship could they fulfil themselves. For in love, in which each self-regard is restrained for the other's sake, each spirit finds also self-increase through joy in the other; and in the community of the lovers love itself is greater than either.

Long ago the lonely Adam of our species had hungered blindly, vainly, for human companionship. Since then, throughout the generations the human creatures had tasted friendship, love, comradeship in work; but without clear perception of its excellence. At last this great prophet, a chosen instrument of the spirit of Man, and supreme lover of his fellows, saw clearly that in this relationship of mutual awareness and cherishing between persons individual human creatures were transformed, dissolved and remade to a finer pattern, and indeed possessed by something greater than themselves. And he affirmed, using inevitably the thought-forms of his people, that this glory residing in the communion of human spirits was in fact God, all-loving, all-knowing and almighty. And because this prophet was indeed inspired by the spirit of

Man, and raised above his fellow mortals in the power of love, and because in his day his people were expecting a great leader, he believed that he himself, the Son of Man, was also the unique Son of God, and that he himself must be the leader, not of that people only but of all mankind. And because the spirit of Man, resident in all men's hearts willed to expiate his own former sin by bearing all men's suffering, the prophet believed that he, the Son of Man, who conceived himself to be also the Son of God the Almighty Lover, was sent by his divine father to die for men's salvation.

Other prophets also there had been, great and small, in every inhabited

land. Stung by the quickening presence of the spirit of Man within them, but confused by the desires and fantasies of those early cultures, all these prophets had roused men somewhat, yet also entangled them in further fantasies. Always the heart of truth that fired them was the same, the excellence of wisdom, love and creative action. But some preached one aspect and some preached others, and all their gospels were distorted by the longing of individual human beings for immortality for their little selves.

5. THE FAILURE OF THE PROPHETS

The spirit of Man, looking back across two millennia, and more, to the few centuries of his great venture with the prophets, sighed and smiled. How he had strained with all his strength to quicken his ailing flesh! And for a while, first here, then there, he had succeeded. One people after another, one great limb of his multiple body after another, had been stirred by the quickening current of a great idea. In land after land an inspired and disciplined few had set all men an example of life in service of the spirit. For a while his whole body seemed to be reviving. But the poison still remained in all his tissues, not easily to be overcome. For the very structure of his flesh, the pattern of men's social relations, had been too long distorted by the disease. The form of society, the organization of men in hierarchies of social classes, was itself largely a product of the poison, so that its structure favoured the disease rather than health. How clearly he now saw it!

True, under the influence of the prophets new social forms and new ways of living were here and there attempted. Men grouped themselves into churches or retired from the world into monasteries, or became solitary hermits, seeking salvation for their individual spirits, or dedicating themselves in selfless adoration to the God whom the prophet of their people had proclaimed to them. Here and there, some few even set out bravely to change the evil forms of men's relationships and found a society that could indeed express the spirit in daily living. But the ancient hierarchies, both social and ecclesiastical, remained powerful. True, century by century the new healthy but tender social tissues proliferated; until at last some became powerful organs. Here and there they even overmastered the ancient order. But the greater they became the more they themselves were infected by the inveterate poison. For the rising tide of spiritual energy which had carried forward the prophets and their first devoted disciples, was not powerful enough to undermine the strongholds of the enemy; and presently the tide began to ebb, leaving behind it a desiccated wrack of institutions which formerly had been the living instruments of the great revival. The spirit of Man remembered how he had struggled with failing strength to stimulate his members once more while they were already coming to terms with the old bad order. He had struggled in vain. Here and there, now and again, throughout the centuries, the smoulder-

ing fire had sprung once more into flame. Some prophet had arisen, some new movement had started in the hearts of men, inspired either by a passing recovery of the old fervour or by a revulsion against new baseness. But soon the flame died down; the new institutions were assimilated to the old. The new organs were poisoned.

Again and again, century after century, in land after land there was some resurgence of the spirit; but with ever-decreasing power. These revivals were but the rearguard waves counter-attacking for the retreating tide.

The spirit of Man, looking back at this time from the age that we call modern, swept the searching beam of his memory over the whole of this period in which, though spiritual passion was mainly ebbing, material power was increasing. Through all that time the great mass of his little members were in fact, though not in theory, slaves. Without the toil of the many neither the luxury of the few nor the structure of society itself could exist. Occasionally some group of the workers, savage with adversity, would dare to rebel. But immediately the whole power of society would be brought against them; and either by violence or by the tyranny of the established myths working in their own clouded minds, the bewildered commonalty would be quelled.

Yet all the while the fortunate were becoming on the whole more prosperous, and even more refined.

As a sick man may remember the wanderings of his own sick mind, so the spirit of Man remembered his faintness and his mental confusion at that time. He remembered too how he had once more gathered his strength for a new kind of attempt to purge his ailing flesh of poison. His members had become more and more spellbound by the established ways of life and of thought. They judged everything by the authority of some ancient prophet, as revealed to them in some distorting scripture or the falsified tradition of some priesthood. By now all such authority, though vital formerly, had everywhere become a support for the old bad forms of life.

The spirit of Man therefore determined so to strengthen the individuality of his members that they would question all authority. They should become more aware of their own personality and less servile to the group. So he set about firing them with a new hunger for fulness of individual life, not hereafter but here on earth.

In the West, quickened by him, they now saw with new eyes, heard with new ears, and relished their world exquisitely. He inspired them, too, with a passion to inquire into the hidden nature of things. Under the renewed influence of that ancient people whose prophets had cared most for wisdom, they now conceived a new loyalty to clear reasoning, a new desire for sincerity in all thinking. By stirring them thus the spirit of Man intended to show them that this road also,

like the road of love, which had proved too difficult for them, must, if followed faithfully, lead them out of the prison of self-absorption, and free them to seek the one true goal, the fulfilment of mankind in wisdom, love and creativity.

He believed that little by little their new learning would strip away from their minds all the childish and wishful fantasies of personal immortality which had so long ensnared them into endless efforts to secure, by faith or ritual or conventional good works, happiness for their too cherished individual spirits after death. At last, he hoped, they would be forced to recognize their littleness; and then, bereft of heir dream of immortality, deprived of their 'souls', they would find their only true salvation in joyful corporate living with their fellow mortals. They would at last consecrate themselves without reserve, as he himself had done, to the fulfilling of the spirit in Man.

He hoped, moreover, that in another way also the loss of their delusions would free them. For these fantasies of an after-life were the opium by which the rulers had spell-bound the common people in all lands, promising them happiness hereafter if they would be obedient to church and state; and, if they rebelled, damnation. Deprived of this drug, they would surely no longer acquiesce in tyranny.

It had seemed to the spirit of Man also that the vast powers promised to his members by science, their new magic, would enable the rulers at last to free the enslaved masses from the necessity of toil. No longer would there be any need at all, he told himself, for the many to be hungry, sickly, ignorant and scarcely human, in order that the few might have the leisure and affluence for carrying on the great adventure of Man. For surely, by the wise use of this new magic, men would speedily abolish hunger, sickness, ignorance and all those natural ills that hitherto prevented men from being fully human.

So he had planned, but the issue was very different from his expectation.

True, in the region where his recent inspiration had been strongest, some of the more intelligent or the least enslaved to the old fantasies, or to the craving for personal power, had indeed done as he had intended. With a new zest for understanding they had set about exploring the mysteries of nature, the movements of planets and stars and falling stones, the impact of chemical substances on one another, the workings of the human body and the secret of its relationship to the mind. Some of them conceived the body as a machine controlled by the soul; but later as a machine self-regulated, with mind as a mere consequence of its activity. The soul was by more and more of them dismissed as an unnecessary hypothesis.

The spirit of Man was surprised and rather amused by their thorough divorcing of matter and mind, and their belief that matter alone was fully real; but he was on the whole well satisfied, for now surely, weaned from fantasies of im-

mortality, they would be less distracted from their proper goal.

But things happened otherwise. Their whole morality had been sanctioned, falsely, by the prospect of reward and punishment hereafter, in eternal bliss or eternal damnation. And so, when they could no longer believe themselves immortal, they were disinclined to burden themselves with righteousness. Slowly but surely the fibres which bound men together in mutual responsibility began to be corroded and broken.

There had been one, however, God-intoxicated like the ancient prophets, but brought to God by the path of intellect, who ill his own life and teaching expressed but also distorted the inspiration of the spirit of Man. He conceived the Whole I as alone fully real, and as both spirit and matter. And the r Whole for him was God. The little human creatures he saw as phantoms, abstractions from the indissoluble reality of the Whole. Their self-will, he declared, sprang from their blindness to the Whole, to the inexpressible beauty of the Whole. He himself was possessed by a passion of self-oblivious righteousness through his devotion to the Whole; and he preached to his troubled fellow mortals that they should seek salvation by rising beyond their individuality and their self-love, to conceive the intellectual love of God.

The spirit of Man had been pleased with this philosopher-prophet. Surely men must now see that not only the gospel of love, which they accepted and constantly betrayed, but also sheer reason demanded that they should rise above the pettiness of self-regard, and live in self-transcending community.

Very few of his members were persuaded. The triumph of reason among them took a different turn from that which the spirit of Man had intended. They had won their new magic of physical science by analysing things into their component parts and studying the behaviour of the parts. Now, therefore, those few among them who cared to think about these mysteries, hoping to understand and control human nature as they understood and controlled the behaviour of matter, set about analysing man. And they were persuaded that a man was indeed a mechanism of appetite and repulsion and calculating self-interest, which itself was an expression of the massed activity of minute physical units. All love, they affirmed, was at heart physical lust, and all idealism self-deception. Right and wrong were fantasies. The only intelligent course for a man was the calculated gratification of whatever cravings impelled him. Few of the little human creatures behaved frankly according to this principle, but its hold upon them steadily increased.

6. THE MODERN AGE

Meanwhile men had begun in earnest to use their new magic for changing the whole condition of human living; but not in the manner that the spirit of Man had intended. A few devoted pioneers did indeed work according to his inspira-

tion. Hoping simply to open the way for mankind's fuller living, they invented innumerable devices for clothing men better, housing them more comfortably, feeding them more amply, and for ridding them of sickness, and of slavery to toil. They won power from the stored energies of the primeval forests. They harnessed steam for the transmission of that power to their machines. From the strange little magic that the ancients had known in amber they developed a mightier magic for their telegraph, telephone, radio and all our thousand electrical ingenuities. With their new rapid transport and communication they brought the ends of the earth together; so that, as never before, the fortunes of men in one land affected the inhabitants of every land.

This material progress had at first delighted the spirit of Man. 'Soon, soon,' he had cried, 'with increased nourishment my whole flesh will be healthy; with increased understanding of one another and their common world the peoples will feel themselves akin, and the rival classes will be bound together in mutual insight and comradeship.'

But very soon it was clear that this was not to happen. The application of science had begun in the fortunate lands where science itself had first begun. It was controlled not by the will of mankind as a whole but by individuals seeking private profit. And so, in order that the machines might be fed and profits piled up, men and women, and children also, were forced to live as cattle, and as uncared-for cattle. Their lives were wholly occupied with toil, with hunger, with fear of their masters, and with such soiled impoverished love as they could snatch. Their limbs and brains, at birth as human as any other's, were crushed by evil conditions down into subhumanity. Meanwhile the craftsmen, heirs of ancient skills, were ousted by the machines, to be ground henceforth between the millstones of starvation and lethal toil. The upshot in those pioneering lands was not, as the spirit of Man had intended, fuller life for all men. Instead, wherever the new magic spread, there was for the workers degradation of body and of mind, and for the few fortunate, power and luxury such as kings and princes had never known.

The spirit of Man had watched the new magic spread its dire effects over all the world. Little by little its new cheap swarming products were carried into every land, and country after country became a workshop for making even more of them. Everywhere the traditional ways of life began to fade, or retreated into the few remaining fastnesses, like snow in spring-time, retreating into the mountains. The' old cultures loosened their grip on men's minds. The prestige of money and personal power and speed and machinery and machine-made luxury ousted the ancient values.

Meanwhile the workshops of the world competed with one another. And because the peoples, though their need was great, lived mostly in penury, and had little money for purchasing, there were more goods than could be sold. And

so profits failed, factories closed, workers were dismissed into deeper penury. And so less goods than ever could be bought, and the whole mad world that the new magic had made circled and spiralled towards disaster, like a spinning-top when its energy is spent.

One method alone seemed able to whip the flagging top into new life. The states, already desperately competing for markets and commercial empires, must pay the industrial masters to arm them ever more heavily. Then factories would open again and workers be once more paid wages. This was accordingly done. To the spirit of Man it soon became clear that, since the jealous states lived in constant dread of one another's armaments, any spark would be enough to touch off those vast explosives in apocalyptic war. And then his multiple body would be hideously tom and tortured, and he himself, the constant and lucid spirit in all men, might well be engulfed in delirium, might even be for ever annihilated.

Once more his plans had been utterly defeated, whether by some innate weakness in the little cells of his flesh or by some alien power that had sown poison and inveterate disease in him far back in his childhood.

He could no longer hope for success by merely trying once more to revitalize his members by making his presence in them felt more powerfully. A few here and there might respond, but the mass of them were by now too deeply diseased for heroic love, or heroic reason, or heroic righteousness.

Fainting under the toxic influence of his disease, yet stung into desperate vitality by the prospect of still more cruel disaster, the spirit of Man earnestly searched for some device by which he might yet save himself.

Clearly the disease was kept in being against all his efforts by the poisoned and deformed tradition and social structure which moulded all men's behaviour and crippled all their spirits. But how could he prevail upon his members to change the whole form of their society if their minds were no longer vital enough to take mass action for the sake of righteousness? Anxiously debating with himself, he wondered whether, if not love, nor reason, then perhaps hate and cold self-interest could rouse men to destroy the vampire that sucked the blood of all, the cancer that was annexing to its own corpulent and hideous flesh the energies of his multiple body.

7. DAWN OF A NEW FAITH

The spirit of Man set out to stir the minds of the oppressed with indignation against the money power that gripped them. He also chose out forerunning prophets to expose the folly of measuring human worth in terms of money, and allowing the blind movements of money to control the fate of human beings. And then he swayed them with a prophet of a new kind, one who could speak in the language of science, one who regarded men in their massed behaviour as simply economic

animals, one who concealed his rage against all oppressors under a manner of studied objectivity. Inspired by the spirit of Man, but, like all the prophets, confused by his own idiosyncrasy and his own fortune, the new prophet conceived his own pattern of truth and error. He affirmed that the whole life of mankind was a predictable causal sequence; that the rise and fall of peoples and social classes, the incidence of wars and revolutions, the sway of religions and all ideals over the minds of men, were the summed efforts of men's economic motives and their economic environment. He declared, moreover, that all history was the story of the struggle of rival social classes for power; that the present master class had now fulfilled its function as the pioneer of mechanism; that the modes of economic production upheld by them were now quite inadequate and already breaking up; that circumstances were forcing men to set up a planned economy controlled by the workers; and that the workers, long repressed, must now of necessity burst their chains, overthrow the masters, and establish a new world-order, planned through and through for human welfare.

While the spirit of Man was watching the slow spread of the new gospel, the expected war seized mankind. And under the stress of war the old order was so strained that in one great region of the world it broke. Another prophet had arisen, a believer in the new faith, a man apt in resolute action, and impelled (so at first it seemed to the spirit of Man) chiefly by righteous hate against the rulers for killing his brother and oppressing the whole people. The prophet's followers, an inspired and self-disciplined few, set the people a high example of self-dedication, and won their allegiance. In a sudden storm the old order based on money was in this land quite destroyed, and a new order was founded.

With wild hope, but also with misgiving, the spirit of Man had watched the birth-throes of this new society. For in all his lifetime there had been no event like this. Never before had a great idea not merely won men's hearts but embodied itself successfully in a new kind of social structure over half a continent. Could this great event be indeed the beginning of his body's return to health? The statesman-prophet and his followers defended their new society with fierce devotion. They did not shrink from destroying many thousands of human beings who were hostile to the revolution. Little by little the seedling that they had precariously planted struck firm roots. The new state grew strong.

The spirit of Man, remembering the failure of his ancient prophet of love, now laughed at his own youthful simplicity. 'My sickness', he said, 'had gone too far to be cured by noble feelings and gentle words, and even by the martyrdom of a great prophet. Not by the slow spread of love from heart to heart could men's poisoned associations be changed but only by a sudden explosion of rage disciplined under cold intellect, only by a great act of violence in a scientifically conceived and executed revolution. Nothing but the surgeon's knife could save me.'

But even as he made this affirmation a chill crept over him. For his nature, after all, was love, not hate. And not in ruthless discipline but only in the glad and free self-expression of all his members could the spirit of Man properly thrive.

He brooded more intently on the great event, and peered more closely into the minds of the prophet and his followers. Presently he recognized that, after all, the real motive that had launched the revolution and defended the new state had been not merely hate of the oppressor but the new passion of comradeship among the oppressed; who for the sake of their fellow workers, their wives, husbands, children and sweethearts, had given themselves in the common cause. The prophet-statesman himself, though stung to hate, was moved first and most constantly by love, by love of his murdered brother and of the oppressed workers. The whole vast revolution, which had seemed at first the expression of sheer hate, was in fact a mighty gesture of outraged love, and worthy of love's great prophet himself, who long ago had died to save men.

Very strange it seemed to the spirit of Man that this should be so. 'Despairing of love', he said, 'I tried to move my members by the force of sheer primitive rage and hate, yet after all it is love that has moved them and stung them to this hate.' But when he considered how rebels and recalcitrants had been shot, or exiled and slave-driven to death, how critics had been silenced, witnesses intimidated, and accused men browbeaten into false confession, and above all how the minds of the young had been drilled into acceptance of the new gospel, the chill of doubt returned. He reminded himself that, if the revolutionaries had not been ruthless in defence of the new state, it would certainly have been destroyed, and that the founding of this new people's state had been by far the most hopeful thing in the modern world. But also he remembered that his members, though minute and so misshapen, were none the less persons, and that even the defenders of the revolution ought to treat even the enemies of the revolution always as persons, never as mere vermin.

Meanwhile the men of money and all their followers throughout the world had done their utmost to destroy the revolutionary state. And many sincere believers in the gospel of love, outraged by the violence of the revolutionaries, had sided with money against the new order.

Presently in the more distressed of the money-states themselves the minds of men began to assume a new temper, a blind rage against the disastrous power of money, and against the falsity of the commercial mind. The spirit of Man saw that he himself was partly responsible for this blind rage, for he had done his utmost to infuriate men against the old order. But he had not seen where mere blind rage would lead them.

8. THE CLIMAX OF MAN'S DISEASE

A false prophet, born of this exasperation, but willing to use the power of the old order for his own ambitious aims, began to cast his spell over a great and distressed people. In him the true fire of the spirit was subtly blended with heats of personal resentment against a society that had scorned him. With passion he felt that individual men and women should be instruments for the expression of something deeper, greater, than themselves; but his impoverished and crooked heart could not conceive that thing save in terms of his own warped nature. And his warped truth was the very gospel that his tormented people craved. They had been defeated in war; he promised them world-conquest. They were deeply unsure of themselves; he told them they were by nature the supreme race whom all others ought to obey. They had suffered grievously through the breakdown of their money-bound society; he exorcised the spell of money, and promised them security, prosperity, plenitude of wealth. They had been paralysed by unemployment; he set industry going again by directing it to the making of weapons. They had been emasculated by the evaporation of all ideals; he gave them a thing to live and die for, the mystic race, of which, he said, all men of the true blood were vessels. They had been sickened by decades of licentious self-seeking; he commanded them to abandon individuality and conform in thought and feeling and conduct wholly to the pattern set them by the race, through its supreme mouthpiece, himself. They had learned to despise the cult of logic-chopping reason; he exorted them to think with the blood. They had been embittered by the cant of the enfeebled religion of love; he preached not love but hate, not gentleness but might and cruelty.

The spirit of Man had watched this great people clutch in their despair at the phantoms which the false prophet evoked for their undoing. He watched the young men, the young women, become intoxicated alike by what was true and what was false in this savage gospel. He was present in every young mind that tortured itself willingly away from the natural flowering of its personality, so as to live according to the crazy precepts of the false prophet's false religion. He watched the massed thousands, uniformed, marching behind their flaming banners; the children carefully hardened to brutality by bullying, and prepared for torturing men by being encouraged to torment cats and dogs. He felt the precious individual cells of his multiple flesh, that were so much more than cells, since they were capable of personality, denatured by the poison; so that henceforth a whole generation of them must constitute a tumour in his body until death should remove them.

Not only in this great people but in others also the poison had conquered. And indeed in every people throughout the world it was at work, here as a suppressed but chronic disease, there threatening disaster. With grief and despair the spirit of Man recognized that even among those newborn peoples where the

true revolution had triumphed and founded the new order, the poison was still obscurely at work, though restrained by the influence of the new social order.

At last, when the false prophet had fully armed his people, he had struck with all his force, helped by formidable allies, at those peoples where the enfeebled powers of money ruled, and the disheartened followers of the true spirit were paralysed with their own past failures. Once more the whole human race was thrown into convulsion. It had seemed to the spirit of Man in the first phase of this paroxysm that the issue might well be fatal, that he who had survived a million years might now, though still in early youth, be destroyed. For though mankind, his flesh, would surely recover even from this greatest war, he, the spirit of Man, might well be killed. And then his animal body, tempered no longer by its soul of intelligence and love, would live on mechanically, until some later and more crazy war should finally destroy it.

9. THIRD INTERLUDE: WINDOWS

Strange how your eyes reveal you!

Some spirits are best made known through brow or lips, or the chiselling of the nose, or the head's carriage, or the hand's proportions, or the gait and rhythm of the whole body. But you stand always at the open windows of your eyes, looking at people passing in that thronged street, the world. Intent and self-oblivious, you do not peep through curtains; you lean frankly forward on the sill, where all, can see you, in the sunlight. (Or is that brightness all your own?) Every passer-by can see you, but one who has watched for decades sees you best.

But eyes? How can those globes of gristle, those camera lenses, speak the soul? They were not made for communication, but just for watching. Ancestral women watched the flying spindle, and the potter's wheel. Ancestral men aimed the flint arrow. Ancestral beasts looked for hand-holds on the trees, judged the ripeness of the golden fruit, caught with the eye's mere corner the tell-tale movement of long grass, or gauged the leap. And much longer ago, long before colour dawned in any mind, ages before even shape was clearly seen, far lowlier creatures, eyed only with blisters on light-sensitive skin, groped their way. And earlier still the wholly-eyeless vaguely felt the contrast of light and shade falling on the body's surface.

Those eyes of yours, those well-proportioned windows through which an inner beauty sees and is seen, are the flower of all that history. But of how much more besides! For as reptilian claws fathered the ape's hands, and these the human artful instruments of making and of gesture, so eyes have found new powers. Through all the human generations they have seen beauty, and they have expressed the spirit. Wide open with interest, half-closed with languor or contempt, staring with hate or sorrow, narrowed for peering at far horizons, crow's-footed at

the corners with frequent smiling, prone to sidelong glancing in shrewdness or in shy enticement, veiled or bright with love, eyes have slowly, little by little though the ages of human living, created their own language.

What wonder, then, that some clear spirits reveal themselves most surely in the unwitting speech of eyes!

Chapter 4 THE SPIRIT OF MAN CONSIDERS HIS PLIGHT

1. THE SPIRIT OF MAN AND THE SPIRIT

Racked by the pains of war and the many social distresses of his multiple flesh, and by the failure of all his efforts to recover health, the spirit of Man fell faint with despair. His will for life and for the fuller expression of his nature faded into lassitude. The death-will tempted him. Why should he continue to struggle, enticed by a goal beyond his powers? Why not sink quietly into nothingness? His flesh had been at once too frail and too rebellious. He could neither strengthen it for the spirit's service nor curb it from licentiousness. Homo Sapiens, it seemed, was a species of inadequate design, a mere pterodactyl of the spirit, and no true bird, perfected for flight. A pterodactyl? Rather a strayed moth, doomed to flutter vainly against prison windows till death should still its restlessness.

Then why, why continue the torment of effort? What need, what duty could compel him? No need at all he recognized in himself but for rest, and sleep, and death.

Yet in perplexity he found that even in this ultimate fatigue and disillusionment he could not, or he must not, surrender. It was becoming increasingly clear to him that he, the spirit of Man, was pledged in some obscure way to some greater, some universal Spirit that was indeed his own true essence, yet more purely spirit than he could ever be. And so he must, he must, school himself to become the faithful instrument of that greater, which was at once the unfulfilled promise of his own nature, and yet also (how could this be?) the infinity that had created him by its own limiting, and that had upheld him in every moment of his being. To this, his source and his goal, he must be true. Must? Why must? He could not say. And yet it was certain that he must.

Seeking new strength, the spirit of Man now looked once more outward from his planet toward the stars. For those great fires, those sparks, perhaps, from some still greater, hidden fire, had latterly become for him a symbol reminding him insistently of his littleness, disturbing him with their dark hint of some ulterior greatness. Now therefore he must contemplate them afresh.

In this our moment of Man's crisis, the astronomers, those eyes through which he studied the heavens, had mostly been drawn aside from their true function into kinds of work urgent for warfare. But a few were left; and these he now impelled with a new wonder, a new will to see their familiar star-fields no longer as fields of

mere data for analysis but as enigmatic features of celestial reality; so that through their telescopes and through their brooding minds he too might for a while contemplate the stars, and strive to see himself in true relationship with them. From his grain of rock, with its hot core of iron, and its film of greenery and ocean, he gazed outward through the deeper ocean of the air. There swung the moon, too prematurely senile to bear life; and there the sun, father of all vital growth in Earth, life's mother. The sun, that one-time god, was after all nothing but a large blaze, a very average, perhaps rather elderly star, a not inexhaustible fountain of vital energy; which, however, might any day explode and devour its little brood of worlds. The spirit of Man scrutinized those worlds, but could make little of them. If some day he could reach to them with feelers of human intelligence, what would he find? Were they perhaps other fertile orbs with presiding spirits like himself, and multiple flesh, alien to his? Or were they just blank worlds of sun-melted rock or of eternal ice, or spheres of inhospitable desert or boundless ocean, with no vital air?

Impatient of his ignorance, he peered beyond the outermost planet, probing the constellations. Seen through mankind's telescopes, the pin-pricked blackness became a blackness thick-laid with dust of diamonds, with here and there a larger brilliant or some great dazzling gem. But even the least was a star, a sun. Immobile, fixed, inert they seemed; but well he knew how, squadron upon squadron, the great suns flowed and voyaged. And all of them together (how well he knew it) formed a vast whirl of sparks, each solitary as a prisoner, goaled by sheer distance from its neighbours. But he reminded himself that the whole galaxy, could he have viewed it from, outside, would have seemed a close-knit organism, compact of streaming cells, free-roaming yet obedient to the whole's nature. Many such seeming organisms, such galaxies, he could indeed see far afield through the directed instruments of his astronomers. And hosts of others, he knew, voyaged beyond human vision, like airborne gulls beyond the horizon, or circling over the antipodean ocean. The spirit of Man seemed almost to know that the whole physical cosmos was itself one organism, with galaxies for members.

And so? And so? Thought surrendered to sheer wonder. Was he, the great spirit of Man, no more, then, than a blood-corpuscle or little atom in the universal organism? Or was he, perhaps, the vital germ of the whole cosmical egg? Was all the rest a lifeless yoke, awaiting his magic? For a moment self-pride swelled him; but at once he recollected that even so, even if by miracle he was the sole vital germ of the whole cosmos, yet not by its own sole power could the germ create the fledgeling, still less could it produce unaided the grown eagle. Only the whole concourse of events could do so. For the eagle's making there must indeed be the germ; but the yoke also, and the mother's care, the prey, the flight-enabling air, and all the past, the whole ancestry, even to primitive life in the early ocean, even to the planets' birth and the primeval nebula and the surmised inscrutable cre-

ative act from which all sprang. Little enough the germ's mere spark of creativity! And he, the half-lucid spirit of earth's ruling species, even if he dared for a moment to think of himself as the germ of the cosmic egg, he must surely feel not self-glory but humility; and dread, lest, directing his spark falsely, he should frustrate the potency of the whole cosmos, and so betray the Spirit.

And if after all he was one of a great host of spirits in worlds sprinkled throughout the cosmos? This was the more exciting thought. A longing for comradeship with his own kind stirred in him. If he could but co-operate with such beings across the light-years and the parsecs of distance! It was, of course, impossible. Each world-spirit must be loyal to his own vision of the Spirit, in utter isolation from his fellows.

The Spirit! At least he must with his whole will affirm his ultimate loyalty to something other than himself, something perhaps darkly glimpsed beyond the galaxies, but brilliantly, imperiously present within him, as the essence of himself yet infinitely more than himself. In himself, it was the will to be aware, to love, to make. Beyond himself, perhaps it was the will of a greater than himself to fulfil the whole cosmos in wisdom, love and creativity.

2. THE DARK OTHER

In the days of Man's infancy his groping members had worshipped gods of their own invention, beings that for him had no plausibility, because they conformed only to the nature of his individual members, not to his own composite nature. But latterly some, though they had at last forsworn all cosmical myths, remained still gropingly loyal to the Spirit in their hearts, until they came to conceive a new divinity, none other than himself, the very spirit of Man.

He judged that in a way they were right; for indeed he himself was the passion of intelligence, love and creative will that smouldered, though deep buried, in every human heart.

But now at last the spirit of Man began to see that this dawning new religion of his members was but a half-truth, and full of danger. For if he, the spirit of Man, was in any manner worshipful, it must be not because he was man but because he was spirit; because, like his little members themselves, his essence was intelligence, love and creative will. Those who worshipped him were indeed true to the Spirit in that they gave allegiance to intelligence, love and creative will; but in circumscribing their allegiance to himself, to the imperfect common spirit of their species, they were false to the universal Spirit, and so to him also, and to their own true nature.

The spirit of Man could not but yearn towards a divinity beyond himself, towards the universal Spirit that was his own essence, yet infinitely more than himself. But also with painful perplexity he recognized in himself an obscure yearn-

ing toward something beyond even the universal and lucid Spirit of intelligence, love and creative action; a yearning toward some alien Other, inscrutable, terrible, yet in some strange dread way most beautiful. The great spirit of Man, who had so slowly, so toil-fully and painfully, awakened through the ages, now seemed at last to feel blindly the presence of that Other, stripped of all the false images that men had vainly conceived to reveal him. Knowing at least what the Other was not, the spirit of Man seemed to know in a way what he in fact was; yet knew of his actual nature nothing save his bare and terrible otherness. He was not Ra nor Siva nor Chronos nor Jaweh nor Jesus. Nor yet (the thought startled him with bewilderment, almost with vertigo) could it be said for certain even that the dark Other was identical with the Spirit, that he was the perfection of all intelligence, love and creative will. For these, which for the spirit of Man and for all finite spirits of every rank must needs be sacred, might perhaps in the Other be transcended.

Considering thus, the spirit of Man, even in the agony of his body's conflict, cried out to the Other, 'Oh, Thou, Thou, Thou!' but then fell dumb. Presently in his heart he whispered, 'How should I, his small and lowly creature, address him; how make contact with him? Stars and galaxies declare him, atoms and electrons manifest him. Every insect, every sparrow, every wild flower proves him. Men in all their ways, both good and evil, fatally express him. And I, though loyal utterly to the clear Spirit that is my essence, salute also, and compulsively, him, the Other. And yet I must for ever doubt whether these two are in fact several or identical. Spirit I humbly know, but what is Thou? Dazzling darkness in the eyes! Shattering silence!'

3. THE REAR-GUNNER AGAIN

Convinced of his impotence in regard to the Other, the spirit of Man turned once more to consider the Spirit, the more familiar, more intelligible divinity, which so insistently and unmistakably claimed his service.

But could that be called a divinity which, it might well be, was no personal consciousness beyond his own personality but sheerly an imperious ideal claiming his allegiance, perhaps quite irrationally? Was this ideal implanted in him by the Other, to be the law of his being, though not, perhaps, of the Other's own being at all? He could not know. But with no trace of doubt he knew that for him, as for his little personal members, the way of the Spirit was the way of life. Throughout the swarm of the galaxies, all personal beings of whatever rank of lucidity must of their very nature give allegiance to the Spirit, or else be false to the clear light within them. For all, the way of life must ever be the way of sensitive intelligence, of loving, and of creating. But the modes of these must strangely vary and conflict. Arid to the lowlier creatures the more lucid expressions of the Spirit must often seem perverse. The spirit of Man, recalling the long pilgrimage of his growth,

saw that for him the Spirit had indeed taken on many a new guise since he had first so darkly conceived it in the time when he was Father Adam.

In that earliest moment of his life there had been no difference between himself and the self of his one sole member in its most quickened state. But now, because his members were very many, there was a gulf between himself and each one of them. They were so diverse. Even in their expressions of the Spirit they were for ever in conflict; for each was enraptured with some one mode of the Spirit's manifestation, some one direction or manner of intelligence, or of loving, or of creating. But he, since he comprised all their diversity, participated equally in all their conflicting achievements. He was the identity in all. Moreover his members were so ephemeral; and he perennial; they, so fettered to the particular brief flowering of their individual selves; he, so remote from that enthralment.

It was difficult, therefore, for him to keep aware of the minute but vivid and concrete lives of his members. He was in danger of ignoring them as a man ignores the particular cells of his brain. But since they were indeed personal, and the whole ground of his own personality, to lose touch with them would be to lose himself and die; and to betray the Spirit. Particularly in this moment of his life he must guard against this danger. For recently all his concern had inevitably been with the great world-influences, and with the need for planning and control of the relations of peoples and of social classes. In his absorption in this immense need, he, the very spirit of Man, was once more forgetting the personal lives of men and women.

With earnest sympathy, even with reverence, the spirit of Man now relived the little lives of now one and now another of his myriad members, the living and the dead; or dwelt upon crucial moments of those lives. And amongst others he chose out the rear-gunner in the aeroplane where a moth had fluttered. With fresh wonder and humility he rethought the young man's thoughts high over the narrow sea. He immersed himself in the obscurity and confusion of the rear-gunner's mind, as though plunging into a turbid and a murky stream. He felt himself pushed this way and that by currents of unconscious impulse, by childhood fears and hungers, long forgotten. He was seduced by ignorance and false reasoning into innumerable follies and trivial purposes. But also, with a shock of pity he experienced the young man's hesitant loyalty toward a spirit that he could only obscurely conceive. It was a longing hopelessly led astray by the conventional cynicism of his pose. Through the rear-gunner's eyes he saw the Spirit not as the clear will for love and reason and creating but as a mere dim and formless light, percolating down through the muddy water. Strange that a being so lacking in clarity should yet, in spite of the torment of his tangled nature and the fetters that society had fastened on him, be able to give his cherished life unfalteringly for so confused and dim a vision of the Spirit. Like the imprisoned moth he was trapped in the great machine, nay he was part of the machine; and yet, unlike the moth, he disci-

plined himself finally to courage and to comradeship in the crew, in fact to the Spirit, though shamefacedly, almost unwittingly.

What could the great spirit of Man himself do more? Within the wider limits of his own ignorance and frailty, he too could only falteringly serve the Spirit. Moreover what was he but the spiritual unity of all his members? He was greater than each merely because he was the best in all, made one in some occult telepathic union. And yet he wondered. Was he not more truly one than many? Then were his members after all mere figments of his own essential and single being? Were they in fact not real individual spirits at all but mere experiences of his own, though received through a host of different viewpoints? But no! That rear-gunner, in being less than the consciousness of all mankind, in being circumscribed by immense ignorance and inwardly warped by the impact of a faulty society, must surely have been something more positive than a passing thought of the spirit of Man himself, must have been a real though a brief individual; and a gallant individual too, capable of a heroism never to be called for, seemingly, from the great spirit of Man himself. For never, seemingly, would the spirit of Man be called upon to die for that greater Spirit that claimed his loyalty, since he himself was the sole known vessel of that Spirit. A mother carrying her child in her own body fights at once for her child's life and for her own; and he, fighting for that greater Spirit which he alone could bring forth, was fighting also for his own survival. But the rear-gunner had given his life that something other than himself should survive. And the City's dead saint had lived to serve those who were far less admirable than herself. Adoring the Spirit, she had for the Spirit's sake given herself ungrudgingly.

4. DISEASED CHRYSALIS

Once more the spirit of Man turned to consider the plight of his multiple body as a whole. He could no longer doubt that every organ, every tissue, of his flesh was now in dissolution. His whole substance was turning to fluid for some strange transformation. His whole form was changing like a cloud. What was to be the issue?

Again, as so often before, he earnestly questioned whether this dread transmutation was indeed the final and lethal paroxysm of his corroding disease, which had entered him far back in his childhood, or whether it could after all be a glorious though torturing rebirth. Oh, rebirth it might be, must be! Hitherto, stage by imperceptible stage, the browsing caterpillar had quietly grown; but now the whole creature was disintegrating, for death or fuller life, for the true imago or for some dread parasitic growth. The dying primitive creature had been after all little more than a formless crowd of cells, a mere polyp or sponge, a confusion of free-ranging and undisciplined individuals, organic for local or vocational ends only,

in families, tribes, nations, mysteries and social classes. The total life of the race was the issue merely of blind forces, impinging on the little creatures of the swarm, and swaying them through their inveterate self-seeking. But now at last it seemed that he, the spirit of Man, so long almost powerless to control his flesh, might some day come into his own, and reign as the directive mind and will of all humanity. And then, wise from all the mistakes of his past, he would so inspire his members that they would work together freely to turn the earth into a paradise, where, generation by generation, men should fulfil their nature joyfully and ever more gloriously as instruments of the Spirit.

As the war's end drew near, the spirit of Man saw more starkly that nothing could save him but a new and lucid will for the Spirit, widespread among the peoples. The upstart empires, those cancers in his flesh, must indeed be destroyed; else there could be no health in his body, and his mind must fail; but more, far more, was needed than this desperate surgery. For the poison had spread throughout his bloodstream, and into every organ of his body.

And so in the very year of the military victory the spirit of Man was forced to doubt whether the victors, though professed champions of the Spirit, had any clear conception of what they would do with their victory. Their concern, it seemed, was increasingly with mere power, with the organization of the world to maintain themselves in power. Some wished only to restore the old sponge structure in which they themselves had formerly prospered. Others planned indeed a close-knit world-organism, but one in which every man and woman should be held in place by steel threads not of comradeship but of regulations, a world in which the Spirit would be as fettered as in the cancerous empires themselves.

And now the spirit of Man himself began to doubt what precisely it was that he needed of his members. In the past it had been easy to see that the need was for them to curb and transcend their wild individuality, that they should be disciplined in the common cause, that the old loose tissues of his flesh should be broken down 'and reshaped into a tighter structure. But no sooner did this end begin to be in sight, no sooner did the victors foresee themselves as controllers of the world, than they themselves became the instruments of a new danger. No sooner did they grasp the need for discipline and world-planning, than they began to forget the purpose of discipline and the goal of planning. Most forgot it, but not all. The saint, killed in the City, and thousands of other humble men and women scattered up and down the world, did not forget.

All the while that the spirit of Man was forcing himself to seek a clearer view of his predicament, his flesh continued to be tormented by the huge convulsion of war. He was in the plight of one who, in a high fever and on the verge of delirium, knows that nothing can save him but a desperate, an almost impossible effort to keep a cool head, and think out his cure, and administer it with precision.

The opposing peoples were now strained to the last extremity, the one side to stave off ruin, the other to win a quick and thorough victory. Great fleets carried great armies to land on the enemy beaches. Great air fleets destroyed city after city. The armies projected themselves in clattering machines and with the fury of innumerable guns across the meadows and the wasted cornfields, and through the wrecked villages. The retreating enemy blasted and burned and tortured. Everywhere the little members of his body accepted discipline and danger, and suffered all manner of pains and mutilations and deaths in the simple hope that by their sacrifice others would be saved, and a happier world made possible. Their sensitive flesh was torn and mangled by the impersonal blast of bombs or the lustful and devilish cruelty of their fellow mortals. They were subjected to scientifically devised torture, or simply destroyed in thousands as vermin, in the cheapest possible manner; or else, as free citizens and fighters, they choked under the sea, or fell headlong from the sky, or were crushed under falling masonry, or burnt to shrunken faggots of charred flesh and blackened bone.

All this physical agony the spirit of Man himself suffered, for their flesh was his flesh. And even their mental terror of extinction he knew, since he resided in them all. Yet in the midst of this distress, and in spite of it, and because of it, he saw more clearly than ever the truth about himself.

'Strange and most subtle', he told himself, even in his agony, 'is the mutual dependence of these little beings and myself. Unless they are wholly disciplined to my will I am torn and crippled by inner conflict; yet if these cells of my body degenerate from true personality and become indeed mere cells, mere cogwheels, mere de-spirited units, utterly obedient to the spiritless organization of the whole, I myself, my true self, must faint into nonentity. For I have no being whatever save as the identity of spirit in each and all of my members. There is only one forlorn hope for me, that they should of their own free will, and not merely by compulsion, discipline themselves for the common good and for the Spirit's sake. But even this is not enough. While disciplining themselves, they must also contrive to be uncompromisingly loyal each to his own individuality and uniqueness.'

The spirit of Man saw what it was that he must now do. His inspiration of his members must be made more precise. It was useless merely to exhort them vaguely to renewed loyalty to the Spirit. He must declare explicitly just what the Spirit demanded of them in this moment of history.

He therefore set about once more clarifying his own thoughts and his inspiration of his members; even now on, the threshold of his delirium. At the very time when men were at last falteringly beginning to carry out his earlier precept, when the more socially-aware of them were propagating successfully a will for social discipline and world-planning, he must bestir himself desparately to in-

spire the more spiritually-conscious with a new tenderness for individuality and for sincere personal awareness. To many of his members, and even to his past self, it had seemed that these two inspirations were opposed to one another; yet in fact each of them cried out for the other for its completion.

The spirit of Man accordingly spoke his new message in innumerable hearts in all the war-tortured and state-ridden lands. 'Remember the great prophet of Love,' he told them. 'Slowly you have begun to outgrow the limitations of his teaching, but at the same time you have forgotten his truth. He persuaded you no doubt to believe questionable doctrines, declaring that men were immortal and that God was their loving father, possibilities that lie far beyond human under-standing. But he also made some of you see that all men are members one of another, and that only in the active love of neighbours, of comrades, can man find salvation. Therefore, be tender, oh always tender, to the individual human being. Plan, you must; for your world is in disorder. Control, you must, and in your present emergency you must not shrink from using even bombs and tanks and machine-guns, for some of the Spirit's enemies are very powerful, and too far perverted to accept any other persuasion. And sometimes, when you yourselves have power, you rightly feel that to be less than firm would be a betrayal. But oh, let firmness be eternally married to tenderness. Even the fallen but still dangerous enemy is human, and a warped instrument of the Spirit. And the little nobody, working in a factory and coming home tired or starved of joy, claims infinite tenderness; even when in his stupidity or blind self-interest he resists benevolent planning. And let it be written across the minds of all rulers in letters of undying fire that unless your planning gives to each little nobody wings and freedom to use them, you plan in vain.'

Millions upon millions responded vaguely to the new inspiration, for the peoples were being harassed by a swarm of tyrannies, great and small, evil or benevolent. They longed as never before for freedom. They were sick to death of discipline, of commands, of forms, of identity numbers and regulations. They desired only to be done with the war, and go back to Civvy Street and a good job, and to have enough money to amuse themselves. Moreover those who had the power of money longed to be free of restrictions on their self-seeking. And so it turned out that this vast craving for freedom was only here and there a will freely to serve the Spirit in personal integrity. It was in the main a desperate thirst to have a good time without responsibility for others.

The spirit of Man's new-old inspiration was vaguely welcomed by most men, both by people of goodwill, and also by those who willed to restore the old licentious freedom. And these assiduously perverted the new gospel for their own convenience. And so the socially loyal, who demanded planning, condemned the new longing for freedom as a trick of society's enemies. Very few welcomed it as the completion of their own social gospel.

Once more the spirit of Man's inspiration of his members failed, perhaps partly through the weakness and confusion of his new prophets, but mostly through the irresistible impetus of social forces which were grinding mankind fatally into the harsh and lethal forms of the worldwide ant-state.

5. THE END OF THE WAR

The bells clang for victory. The trumpets blast and the flags wave. Troops march in procession through every city. Crowds cheer. They cheer for a golden but a phantom future. The past is but a pain in the memory. None but the bereaved and the mutilated greatly care for it.

The bells clang for victory, for peace, for the passing of life's long black-out, for the return to Civvy Street, for the hell of a good time coming; and for the triumph (so the victors say) of the Spirit over the powers of evil that so nearly conquered the planet.

But the spirit of Man does not greatly rejoice; for though one disaster has been gallantly prevented, another is in the offing. One paroxysm of his disease passes, but the disease is not cured. The chrysalis is astir for the great rebirth, but the moth is still imprisoned, and the parasite snugly housed in every cell of his fever-weakened flesh.

The spirit of Man, though hoping still, confronts the future with misgiving.

6. FOURTH INTERLUDE: TIME AND ETERNITY

Today! Tomorrow!

Today comprises the whole present universe of infinite detail and inconceivable extent. Today is fields and houses and the huge sky. Today human creatures are being conceived, are born, are loving, hating, dying. Electrons and protons in their myriads are everywhere busily performing their unimaginable antics. Planets attend their suns. Galaxies drift and whirl.

All this today comprises, and with all this the whole past is pastly present in today; Queen Victoria, Babylon, the ice ages, the condensing of the stars in the primeval nebula, and the initial inconceivable explosion of creativity.

But tomorrow? It is a wall of impenetrable fog, out of which anything may come.

When we remember or discover the past, we confront something that is what it is, eternally though pastly. It is such and such, and not otherwise. Our view of it may indeed be false, but it, in itself, is what in fact it was, however darkly it is now veiled. No fiat, not even an Almighty's, can make the past be other than in fact it was, and eternally is. God himself, if such there be, cannot expunge for me the deeds I now regret.

But the future? It is not veiled, it is nothing. It has still to be created. We ourselves, choosing this course rather than that, must playa part in creating it. Even though we ourselves, perhaps, are but expressions of the whole living past at work within us, yet we, such as we are, are makers of future events that today are not. Today the future actuality is nothing whatever but one or other of the infinite host of possibilities now latent in the present. Or perhaps (for how can we know?) not even latent in the present, but utterly unique and indeterminate.

Yesterday is palpably there, there, just behind me; but receding deeper and deeper into the past, as I live onward along the sequence of the new todays.

But tomorrow?

Yesterday I had porridge and toast for breakfast, as on the day before, and the day before that. Yesterday, according to instruction I caught a train to Preston. I had set my plans so as to reach the station in good time. And because a thousand other strands of planning had been minutely co-ordinated, at the appointed minute the engine driver, who had been waiting in readiness for the guard's whistle and his waving flag, moved levers. The train crept forward. In that train I found myself sitting opposite a lovely stranger, not according to instruction, nor as the result of any plan. Soon we were talking, looking into one another's eyes; talking not of love but of nursing and hospitals and the wished-for planned society, and of her Christian God, and of a future life, and of eternity. Before we met, before our two minds struck light from each other, our conversation had no existence anywhere. But then in a fleeting present we began creating it. And now the universe is eternally the richer because of it, since irrevocably the past now holds it, now preserves in a receding yesterday that unexpected, that brief and never-to-be-repeated, warmth and brightness.

With her I have no past but yesterday, and no future; but with you, my best known and loved, I have deep roots in the past, and flowers too, and the future.

Some fifteen thousand yesterdays ago there lies a day when you were a little girl with arms like sticks and a bright cascade of hair. In a green silk frock you came through a door, warmed your hands at the fire, and looked at me for a moment. And now, so real that moment seems, that it might be yesterday! For that particular fraction of the eternal reality is always queerly accessible to me, though fifteen thousand yesterdays ago.

But tomorrow?

Tomorrow, shall I, as it has been planned, catch the bus for Chester? Or shall I miss it? Or will it refuse me, or never start on its journey? Or having absorbed me will it collide with a hearse or a menagerie van? Will the freed lions and tigers chase people along the street? Shall I feel their huge claws in my flesh and smell their breath, and know that for me at least there is no tomorrow? Or perhaps some hidden disease is ready to spring on me tonight? Or a bomb? Or

will the laws of nature suddenly change, so that stones leap from the earth, houses become soaring pillars of rubble and dust, and the sea rushes into the sky? Or will the sky itself be drawn aside like a curtain, revealing God on his throne, his accusing finger pointing precisely at abject me? Or at a certain moment of tomorrow will everything simply end? Will there be just nothing any more, no future at all?

I cannot answer these questions with certainty. No man can answer them with certainty. And yet if I were to bet a million pounds to a penny that things will go on, and half a million that they will go on fundamentally much as before, few would call me rash.

Yesterday the events which are now so vividly present and actual were in the main inscrutable and not yet determined. And therefore yesterday they had, we say, no being. And yet, and yet—there are moments when we vaguely sense that, just as the past is eternally real, though pastly, so the future also is eternally what in fact it will be, though for a while futurely to the ever-advancing present. We move forward, and the fog recedes before us, revealing a universe continuous with the present universe, and one which, we irresistibly feel, was there all the while, awaiting us. Could we but by some magic or infra-red illumination pierce the fog-wall, we should see the future universe as in fact it is. So at least we sometimes irresistibly feel. My conversation with that lovely and serious travelling companion—was it not always there, awaiting me, knit irrevocably into the future as it is now irrevocably knit into the past? When I was born, was not that journey awaiting me?

Through the interplay of external causation and my own freely choosing nature, was not that happy encounter already a feature of the eternal fact, though futurely? Was it not equally so when the Saxons first landed on this island, and when the island itself took shape, and when the sun gave birth?

And fifteen thousand yesterdays ago, when you and I first looked at each other, was not our future even then just what in fact it has been? It was of course related to us futurely, and was therefore inaccessible… but was it not all the while there, lying in wait for us? One does not suppose that the centre of the earth, because it is inaccessible, is therefore blankly nothing, until someone shall burrow down to it.

And indeed I cannot even be sure that in that moment of our first meeting the future was, in very truth, wholly inaccessible. For in looking into your eyes I did (how I remember it!) have a strange, a startling experience, long since dismissed as fantasy, yet unforgettable. It was as though your eyes were for me windows, and as though curtains were drawn aside, revealing momentarily a wide, an unexpected and unexplored prospect, a view obscure with distance, but none the less an unmistakable prevision of our common destiny. I could not, of course,

see it clearly; for it was fleeting, and I was a boy and simple. But I saw, or I seemed to see, what now I recognize as the very thing that has befallen us, the thing that has taken so long to grow, and is only now in these last years flowering. Today our hair is greying, our faces show the years. We can no longer do as once we did. But the flower has opened. And strangely it is the very flower that once I glimpsed even before the seed was sown.

Fantasy, sheer fantasy? Perhaps! But when we think of time and of eternity, intelligence reels. The shrewdest questions that we can ask about them are perhaps falsely shaped, being but flutterings of the still unfledged human mentality.

The initial creative act that blasted this cosmos into being may, or may not (or neither), be in eternity co-real with today, and with the last faint warmth of the last dying star.

Chapter 5 MAN'S FUTURE

1. THE SPIRIT OF MAN HAS A VISION

The bells! The bells clang for victory. They strike all hearts to thankfulness, and many to joy; but some to cruel memory of past promise, now never to be fulfilled. And some, in the intolerable conflict of hope and new foreboding, are gripped to silence. These, these only, are the eyes of tile spirit of Man, facing the fog-wall.

Heedless of the bells and the trumpets, the processions and the flags and the cheers, the spirit of Man stares at the blank future, with hope but with new foreboding. He presses with all his eyes against the impenetrable fog. So fixedly is he nailed to the blankness of the future that the present sweeps past him unobserved.

He reels into a strange trance. For a pregnant instant, between one beat and the next beat of the crashing bands, he is plucked seemingly quite out of time into eternity, and dropped back headlong upon the advancing wave-crest of the present, enriched with huge experience. For between one blast and the next blast of the trumpets the spirit of Man sees all his future æons, and his senility and death. He sees also the lifetimes of a thousand worlds, and the death-time of the cosmos. He sees the Spirit, the true Spirit, full grown at last but crippled, groping still toward the dark Other. But whether she is taken by her beloved, he cannot know.

2. HE TRIES TO REMEMBER THE VISION

The bells clang on. The crowds in every metropolis still cheer. But the spirit of Man is heedless, rapt in the fading memory of that huge instant.

What was it that seized him? Could he but recapture the lost vision! He remembers only that it was the opening up of an immensity never conceived by

man, an immensity that was at once (how insignificant and irritating these threadbare words!) most terrible and yet most beautiful, in a manner humanly unimaginable. And embraced within this vastness, like a cell in a living body, like a little word in a great song, a little tremor in a great orchestration, a flicker of being, long past and yet eternal, there lived and died our universe of space and time, and many-worlded galaxies, and of the many-mannered spirit. Chilled and dismayed by the confused memory of that immensity, the spirit of Man yet longs to be engulfed in it and suffused with it, as the hart the water-brooks. For that vastness, alien beyond all conception, was also (how could this be?) strangely familiar, intimate even. That instant on the remotest peak of being was also (but how, how could this be?) a startling homecoming.

The remotest peak of being? No! The spirit of Man, scrutinizing his future memory, recognizes that he cannot claim to have been there; for even in that soaring instant the presence of the inaccessible Other overhung him. Not to the summit had his assumption borne him, but to a lowly spur, a foothill only. Very far above, cloud-veiled, more guessed than seen, the stark horn itself rose, forbidding, inaccessible to all creatures, even to the spirit of Man. Yet unreasonably lovely. And far below, below the ravines and hanging forests, down in a vast plain, a little stream lay like a faint scribble, one among many, glimpsed through the haze. And this little stream, one of many, the spirit of Man recognized as his own home-universe of space and time, and of many-worlded galaxies.

To us, in our more intimate and temporal experience, our universe is instinct with life and change; yet from the viewpoint of eternity's foothills it was fixed, complete, with all its surging æons equally present.

Seeking a nearer view, the spirit of Man had swooped downward with hawk-like scrutiny. Poised over our universe, he saw in more detail all the long reaches of our river of time laid out before him, from the stream's initial wellspring in eternity to its final stagnation in the bog of eternal changelessness.

3. THE VASTNESS AND THE HORROR

All this he had seen in the great instant. But now, dropped back once more into time, and swept forward on the wavecrest of the present, he tries eagerly but with uncertain success to recapture his late vision.

He dimly recalls that within one stretch of rapids in the stream's middle reaches a single fixed swirl of ripples was seen to be his own whole life in time. There, half-seen, half-guessed, lay his first waking in Father Adam. And there too his death. And in between lay all his ages, that for us are past or future. There, the gleaming ripple of his childhood's golden age, there the age of his prophets, there the onset of science. And there also he saw, much as a man on his death-bed may remember an incident of his childhood, the moment of history which we call

present. There the bells clanged for victory. There, or but a tremor earlier, the rear-gunner in a certain aeroplane felt a moth's chance kiss. There, an obscure saint in a city was destroyed, and also leapt to bliss. Today, after that instant of eternity how strange it seems to the spirit of Man that, before his illumination, this our present moment should have appeared as the crux of man's whole career, perhaps of the whole cosmos! Searching his fading memory of the eternal view, he now affirms that the truth is in fact far otherwise. This moment that for us is present is not, alas, the moment of his rebirth from the chrysalis to become the finished moth. Our struggle is a mere premonitory birthpang, one of many. Not till long ages afterwards, so his memory of the eternal view affirms, does the imago ripen fully and emerge.

Probing his memory to recover the times that for us are future, the spirit of Man sees only the general form of human history. Of the little span that most concerns us, and him also today, the lifetime awaiting men now living, he remembers almost nothing. Even of the next few centuries he recovers only a shadowy and deceptive image. So very long is the æon of his whole career that even a millennium, unless it happens to be in some way unique or momentous in the eternal view, may be as indistinguishable as to us a day among a thousand others far back in childhood. The events of a century or a decade may be quite indiscernible. No doubt here and there some trivial and fleeting incident, such as a casual war or abortive social upheaval, may freakishly obtrude itself in his future memory; but in general such brief events present themselves to him only if they were specially striking or significant.

The war which bulks so largely in all our lives, and in his own life today, his memory does detect; but he recovers little more of our time than the bare outline of the war's occurrence, and its issue. It was a minute though vivid incident in a far lengthier phase, namely the great world-revolution, which, though today its achievement seems to us almost at hand, lies in fact very far away in the middle distance of his immense lifetime. In the light of his future memory, if memory it is, he now regards today with sobered judgment. For in the decades and centuries to come he seems to see war upon war, each more destructive than the last. Century by century ever more shattering explosives were flung from country to enemy country, from continent to continent, half-circling the planet. Poison gases and the bacteria of disease were in due course freely used. With subatomic power men contrived to blast their cities instantaneously into rubble, to tumble mountains into populous valleys, to sink whole countries under the invading ocean. Nay worse, with newfound psychical techniques enemy governments attacked one another's populations, driving whole peoples crazy, so that millions turned berserk, slaughtering one another aimlessly in the streets, murdering their own children, flinging themselves off high places, or into the sea.

These maniac deeds the spirit of Man remembers only in a shadowy way,

and with the aloofness of one remembering a dream. For he recalls them through his instant of exaltation in eternity, as old unhappy far-off things, needful somehow for the eternal glory, and themselves thereby redeemed.

But when he turns from his remote vision to the actual past, and recalls in intolerable detail the horror of our own war, and of the scientific, the diabolic torturing that preceded it, and behind that all the savagery of men throughout his long experience, the illimitable vistas of man-made horror, past and future, appall him. 'What present benefit,' he cries, 'what remote Utopia or far-off divine event, can recompense the brief personal beings of my flesh for such agony and such curtailment of their fleeting lives?' And now, quickened by his memory of past distress, his imagination feels the full weight of future pain and sorrow. The tom flesh, the crippled minds, the hopes frustrated, the loves cut short! Inexorably they pile up, century by century, age by age. And with shame and despair the spirit of Man recognizes that much of this huge weight of misery must burden his own conscience. For again and again he himself through ignorance or obtuseness had inspired his members falsely, to their destruction.

'Surely', he cries, 'it would have been better if I had never been conceived on this planet, if terrestrial life had remained for ever subhuman. For, though nature, red in tooth and claw, is brutish, man is devilish.'

But no sooner has this cry escaped him, than he reminds himself that it was but half the truth, nay less. For how tender toward one another could his members be, and how aspiring, when their nature was not poisoned by adverse circumstance! From Father Adam to the last of all human 'generations men had struggled constantly in their confused, conflicting ways, to be true to the spirit in them. And in some ages, past or to come, whole peoples had reached the very threshold of a gentler, richer humanity.

But all, if he must believe his vision, must in the end be vain. Never in all the future æons, it seems, is man to fulfil his promise: The moth, trembling vainly on the brink of flight must in the end be crushed.

Dismay at that remote disaster weighs down upon the spirit of Man.

But then, like one who has stepped into a deep bog or quicksand, and throws himself on his back for security on the firm ground, the spirit of Man desperately reverts to his high vision of eternity. For the ice peak still strangely holds him. Darkly he knows, or seems to know, that the suffering of a thousand worlds and countless universes is somehow transfigured in eternity. But how? But how? He cannot know. Even on eternity's foothills he could not know. And now he knows only, as he knew then, but then more clearly, that in eternity all is indeed transfigured. He knows also, with dread but with acceptance, that not only for his little members but for him also the future holds, along with joys and half-awaking, a thousand pains, and in the end annihilation. Yet, knowing this, he also knows in

virtue of his instant of eternity, that the agony and sorrow and annihilation will not have been in vain. But how, but how, can it be not in vain?

4. THE MOTH BREAKS FROM THE CHRYSALIS

Impatient lest the vision should escape him wholly before he can grasp its import, the spirit of Man scrutinizes it more closely, passing forward along the darkling corridors of his future memory to reach once more and to comprehend more clearly his remembered death and that which followed after, not seemingly to him but to some other, awakened in his death.

He sees that even during the recurrent wars of the near future the new texture of his multiple body was still slowly forming. More and more, mankind was becoming an organism, though still tom and warped by the repeated paroxysms of the disease. An organism, or a mere mechanism? It was a system knit for power, not for the spirit. Alike in peace and in war the lives of his little members were gripped ever more strictly in the organic mesh, a steel mesh alas not of comradeship but of the mechanism which their science had spawned. And so they were knit more and more closely together as the flesh of a single world-wide creature, though a creature still prone to internecine conflicts. And though, through men's diabolic inventiveness, the horrors of warfare became ever more destructive, they became also briefer and rarer. For the unity of the world-organism painfully but triumphantly reasserted itself, gripping its rebellious organs and all its little individual cells ever more firmly in the steel mesh. At last there was no possibility of any further rebellion. Wars ceased. All the tissues of the imago, it seemed, were fully formed and integrated; but by mechanism and domination only, not in the spirit.

Something was very wrong. The formed creature could not burst the chrysalis. The moth could not free its wings and fly into the new world that awaited it. Humanity, though it had possessed itself of all the resources of its planet, and though the whole life of mankind was fully organized for power, was paralysed. The spirit of Man was paralysed in all his members.

Peering with difficulty into that dreary phase of his career, he sees that though all human beings were at last well grown and prosperous, and all exercised their particular skills fully in the common enterprise, and all had a sufficiency of easy pleasures, yet in none was there clear awareness of the spirit. Reason was fettered, love stifled, and there was no creating. All men performed by rote the activities that were allotted to them, and none, or very few, asked what was the purpose of it all. The tradition of the spirit was lost. Men lived in an endless sleep-walk.

As the centuries and the millennia passed, and the moth, Man, still lay paralysed in the chrysalis, a subtle decay secretly began to lay hold of all its tissues.

For the creature could not live its living death for ever without corruption.

The spirit of Man remembers how, when he himself was already faint with the sluggishness of his members, and fearful of annihilation, he put forth a passionate fiat to give light to the clouded minds of men, so that here and there a few were disturbed in their somnambulism. Little by little, these few, groping century by century, and often martyred for their recalcitrance to the great mechanism, recreated the lost wisdom, which the forgotten prophets had long ago conceived, and overlaid with fiction.

It seems to the spirit of Man that for a long age the new awakening made little progress, for it conflicted with the all-powerful mechanism of the world, the steel organic mesh of the world-organism. But little by little, under his desperate goading, the wished-for miracle happened. Century by century, the whole world's temper changed. The struggle between the still somnolent minds and the awakened minds was worldwide and desperate, the one side armed with the scientific lore and all the mechanical resources of the world, the other armed only with love of the spirit.

At last the masses of men were all smouldering with the new fire, and the great change happened. Control of the world passed suddenly from the somnolent to the awakened. The spirit of Man came at last into his own. The finished creature, Man, burst its bonds. The moth, emerging from the close world of the chrysalis into the great air, spread frail, cramped wings to harden in the sunlight of an ampler world. It was a perfected, yet an imperfect creature; fashioned through and through for life in a new element, yet through and through scarred by the grub's old disease. For the past ages of hate and fear had left their mark on the very texture of human mentality. Men were no longer slaves, but their minds were moulded to a culture fashioned by men in chains. The moth was formed and free, but weak and sickly. Ever and again its individual members yearned for the lost freedom of the chrysalis, or for the licentious freedom of the disease.

But little by little, so it seems to the spirit of Man, the wings were smoothed out and set, the new tissues strengthened. One by one the old horror's traces were expunged. Mechanism, formerly man's tyrant, became his slave, science his willing servant. The earth was transformed from an aimless generator of power into a fitting home for free men and women. And with the change even power itself increased, since free men could foster it better than slaves. And so, with the lavish use of power, coastlines were altered, lost continents lifted from the ocean bed, deserts made fertile, the arctic warmed, cities rebuilt to nobler plans. All men lived in modest affluence, and all had access to all lands in their own vehicles of flight. The children grew up to freedom and friendliness. The young men were indeed sons of the morning. And all citizens, being friends in a common work, spent themselves gladly in the thousand diverse enterprises of the new world.

The old, peaceful with fruition, rested in life's evening, and awaited death as the tired toiler sleep. For in every mind the spirit of Man was present as the final judge of action and the final consolation in all sorrow.

Century after century, age after age, men continued to embellish their planet and explore the universe with the far-reaching eyes of science. Age after age they developed the human spirit into an efflorescence of art, personal awareness and metaphysical imagination. Ever exploring, they came now and then on strange new veins of spiritual ore; they broke suddenly into new worlds of beauty or personal being or abstract truth.

5. SIX HUMAN WORLDS

But as time passed there was less and less opening for further venture. Increasingly the generations were forced to repeat the achievements of their forerunners. The whole of life became a gracious ritual, but still a ritual. The instrument was perfected, but the music, though exquisite, was repetitive of the ancient themes. The moth's wings were ripe for flight, but they could only quiver monotonously and ineffectively. The creature seemingly had not the instinct to take wing.

The spirit of Man recalls how, though in full possession of all his members, he was perplexed and impotent. For life is movement, and adventure; and where they are not, comes a creeping death. It is spirit's very nature, at whatever level of its being, in all its finite forms, to strive for enrichment through intercourse with other spirit, and in that enrichment to be reborn. Without this soaring, comes the creeping death. The spirit of Man knew well that, unless he could break the spell of this happy but barren ritual, mankind must sink once more into an age-long sleep-walk, even as the ants and bees. And so once more he chose out prophets to rouse men into a new discontent.

In answer to this new call the human race once more bestirred itself. Violently once more the moth's wings trembled for flight. And that it might at last succeed, men now gave their main energies to perfecting human nature for sensitivity, intelligence, loving and creating.

In due season a race of nobler human beings peopled the earth. They saw with finer and more colourful vision, heard and smelt with more than the dog's discrimination. Their touching was as delicate as the bee's. With far-reaching and deep-probing intelligence they swept aside the primitive concepts of their forefathers and fashioned a whole new universe of ideas, adequate to their new experience. Their own nature, too, was limpid to them. And in the subtlety of their self-knowledge and their awareness of each other the spirit of Man became more vital and more lucid. The new human race applied its wisdom to the exploration of earth's sister planets, in search not of power but of comradeship. In accordance with the exhortation of their prophets, they looked for strange intelligences, alien

in idiosyncrasy but identical in underlying spirituality. With these they intended to create a far-ranging community of worlds. But all their gallant exploration revealed merely that man was alone in the solar system. Neither on sultry Venus, where the air could not support life, nor on cold, arid Mars, where life was but a patchwork of lowly vegetation, nor on torrid Mercury nor great Jupiter, nor on any other planet did men find intelligence. The spirit of Man, recalling that chill discovery through his future memory, savours once more the loneliness that assailed him. Looking outward from the remotest planet, men wondered whether perhaps throughout all the starry blackness there lay nowhere at all any peopled sphere but their own dear earth.

But the new mankind would not accept defeat. They set about the daring task of producing, even from human stock, races adapted to live in those desert planets. For such races, living in such different worlds, would surely be so far different in body and mind from terrestrial man that together the peopled planets would indeed create a new diversity and depth of spiritual insight and community.

This was accordingly attempted. And after many centuries of millennia the solar system became a commonwealth of I minded worlds, each occupied by a race fitted to its peculiar conditions, and unviable elsewhere. And the spirit of Man was the spirit identical in those diverse populations. Thus Venus, habitable now in virtue of the oxygen suspired by a specially bred vegetation, was the kindly home of a humanity fashioned to her sultry climate. Mars, now gifted with an enriched atmosphere, supported deep-chested giants who leapt and climbed like gibbons in their little world. On massive Jupiter and ringed Saturn pygmies with mighty thighs, and feet like pedestals, held themselves with difficulty upright against the tug and pressure of their planet, and fought the eternal cold with power from fractured atoms. Even on far Uranus small fat-protected human creatures lived in underground cities. Only the two outermost planets remained uncolonized.

Each of the six worlds developed through the centuries its own appropriate way of life, its own art and wisdom. Each was sufficient to itself for life's necessities, but all shared the luxuries and the art and wisdom of all. Conflict of will between the worlds was not unknown; as when the Uranians demanded that the Terrestrials should equip their Antarctic Continent to be a vast settlement for visiting Uranians, who could live only in the most frigid terrestrial climate. But since all these races, though so diverse, were loyal to the spirit of Man, identical in them all, conflict, though often distressing, was an enrichment.

It seems to the spirit of Man, exploring his future memory, that for a million years or more the races of the solar planets perfected their societies and embellished their cultures. But in the end they too, like the original terrestrial mankind, reached stability, and entered upon a long phase of ritual living.

The spirit of Man, now the mature spirit of six diverse worlds, foresaw once more the creeping death that stagnation promised. Once more he gazed outward toward the stars. All the psychical insight of the six worlds had failed to make contact by any psychic technique with any intelligence beyond the confines of the solar system. Though men were always seemingly upon the brink of some great revolutionary advancement in telepathic skill, they could never achieve it. And physical contact with the few planets of the nearer stars seemed impossible, so vast was the ocean of interstellar space. Every attempt at communication, physical or psychical, proved utterly barren.

For æons the six worlds continued their happy but stereotyped living. Since every age was identical with every previous age, there was less and less for the quick intelligence to do. And so it sank little by little into coma. Science became a traditional mystery, art a dextrous play on age-old conventions, personal relations a matter not of mutual awareness but of formal manners; religion, once a crusade, became merely a comfortable and seemly ritual.

The spirit of Man, like a spectator at a boring play, or a traveller fallen into a snowdrift and struggling against the drowsiness that preludes death, wrestled with the oncoming floods of sleep.

Meanwhile, for thousands and millions of terrestrial years the six worlds continued their frustrated living. The day grew longer. The moon, swinging outward from her parent, showed a smaller disc to Earth's inhabitants; then, creeping slowly inwards age by age, our satellite grew to a huge portent in the sky; until at last, under the strain of the planet's gravitation, it broke into a million fragments to form a bright Saturnian ring, which men saw henceforth as a dazzling sunlit arch across the whole night sky. Meanwhile the sun himself, squandering his energy, displayed a smaller disc.

And still the six world-peoples, like six sleep-walkers dancing hand in hand, performed their endless ritual of living.

Æon upon æon this continued. The forms of the constellations changed. One by one the older stars were dimmed, and then extinguished. And one by one those that were still in their prime reached that crisis which so many stars must in their season suffer. Blazing one by one with fantastic effulgence for a few weeks, they then shrink into senility.

The six worlds knew that presently their sun must do likewise, and engulf or sear his planets.

6. THE END OF MAN

Today, while the bells clang for victory, the spirit of Man recovers from his future memory the temper of that age when expectation of the final catastrophe first possessed the minds of all men. No way could be devised to save the worlds

from destruction. Little man could by no means check the forces of an exploding star; nor harness them, nor escape them. The six worlds, living under the shadow of annihilation, changed their temper. And the spirit of Man at last threw off his lethal drowsiness to face a mortal hurt, not in hope that it might be averted, but to prepare himself for his end.

Throughout the six worlds all men and women faced the same urgency. The exact date of the explosion was unpredictable, but it might now occur at any moment, and certainly within a few centuries. For a while the human peoples, self-disciplined to the spirit, debated anxiously whether to commit mass suicide at once or to carry on their affairs in contempt of the future. In the end they decided not to forestall the disaster, not even to cease from procreating. For perhaps, after all, the calculations were faulty, and a thousand years of decorous civilization might still be possible. And even if, as seemed most likely, the end must come within a century, they were determined to meet it with full consciousness and with dignity. Let the children still be born, even if they must soon be slaughtered. Let the spirit of Man experience fully to the last possible moment. Let his vast treasure of experience, gathered through so many æons, be wholly completed before it should be laid with reverence and awe at the feet of the inscrutable Other.

And so for many centuries the six worlds lived on, expecting instant death. During this time they were mainly concerned to explore by psychical means the Spirit's relation to the Other, and their own prospects in eternity. But their researches discovered nothing. The Other, it seemed, was utterly indifferent to their fate.

Small wonder, then, that despair and savage rebellion against the dark Other at last began to stir among the six world-peoples. The spirit of Man in that last brief moment of his long life was racked once more by conflict among his members. For in each world, though one party remained faithful to the Spirit, another revolted. 'What is the good, what the good', they cried, 'of continuing loyal to that Other, who is utterly inaccessible and indifferent. And why should we persist in service of the Spirit, a mere phantom that has after all no standing in the cosmos, and is a mere figment of our own foolish minds. All the generations, ever since Father Adam, have deceived themselves. We will use our last centuries, or years or moments, solely to snatch pleasure.' And so under the suspended sword they guzzled every joy that their science could give them. And those upon Uranus, hoping against hope that by some rare chance, or unforeseen eventuality, they might be too far out from the sun to be caught within the actual incandescence, burrowed frantically into the deep rock of their planet, extending their subterranean cities, to escape the coming heat.

But in every world a large number of those ultimate human beings remained loyal to the Spirit. 'Though we alone', they said, 'in all the cosmos may be the

Spirit's vessels, and we so soon to vanish, yet we are for the Spirit even to our last breath.'

The spirit of Man, though once more he was not master of all his members, was absolute in many. Awake, as in no earlier moment of his life, he saluted the Other, and prepared for the last agony, and sleep.

The moth, the finished creature that had never flown, now faced its death. And though despair threatened to paralyse its limbs once more, the tremulous wings now beat with new power, beat bravely, beat with the strength and rhythm almost of flight. But presently wings and flesh and spirit must all be shattered, crushed by giant footfall.

On a certain day the sun's gathering energies, pent within his shrinking surface, burst suddenly abroad. An expanding sphere of fire welled outwards.

For a few hours the peoples of the six worlds were blinded by sheer light. Then world by world they were engulfed in flame.

The spirit of Man, like the rear-gunner whom so long ago a moth had kissed, was annihilated.

7. FIFTH INTERLUDE: THE HOUSE WITHOUT YOU

I have come home to an empty house. For three nights and three days it will be without you.

It is the same house as ever, but so different; a hearth without a fire, a lamp unlit, the score of a song that is not being sung. In the dining-room, on your chair's back an old blue coat waits where you left it. In the kitchen your gardening-gloves hang over the fire-place, while the clock counts the seconds of your absence. In the larder are the dishes you have cooked for me, to last till Friday. In the bedroom, an ancient hair-brush and a crippled comb, scent bottles, books that you never have time to read, and pamphlets, leaflets, papers; and the bed, soon to be freighted on one side only.

The sooner I am asleep the better, for without you this place is not home.

When you are here, it is the very stronghold of reality. The wind may howl around it, but always vainly. True, a welter of phantoms is ever surging against these walls, phantoms of war, social conflicts, evolutionary forces; and, beyond all, the cold unknown. They are all huge and formidable, and some of them must actually be dealt with; and yet all of them, while you are here, are insubstantial, somehow unreal. Even the bombs that shook the house (so that a particular rattling door-handle always cows me) were somehow, for all their screaming and blasting, not quite real.

But now, with you gone away, there is no light here to drive back the invading shadows, no warmth to withstand the outer cold. The phantoms have turned

real. The wind's howl is frightening. The all too tangible weight and pressure of a brute universe thrusts against these frail walls. They sag inward, they crack and gape, revealing the driven clouds, a war-sick planet, and the dying suns, gripped within the eternity of the cold dark.

But on Friday when you come home, the lamp will be lit once more, the song will be sung again, the ghosts will be laid. For the thing that unites us, the spirit that comprises us as the sphere its hemispheres, will be once more and indubitably the heart of reality.

Chapter 6 THE COSMOS, AND BEYOND
THE COSMICAL COMMUNITY

Today, while the bells clang for victory, the spirit of Man remembers futurely the instant of his death. His vision, snatched between one stroke and the next stroke of the bells, was just the vision that will confront him in his future dying, now precognized. With perplexity and wonder he now in future memory reviews his dying. For in that instant he, even as had happened to a certain rear-gunner æons earlier, was both destroyed and wakened.

In the very act of falling headlong into eternal sleep and nothingness, the spirit of Man saw all his ages miraculously displayed before him, from his conception in Father Adam to the destruction of his six world-peoples. The many phases of his life were all present to him, like a string of beads, various, each one variegated and darkly translucent, Each obscurely revealed within itself depths of meaning formerly hidden from him.

And in that instant of his annihilation, while he assessed each movement of his life, he was anxiously aware that another being, not his familiar self, was also judging; watching, as it were, over his shoulder. This alien self, that was not his familiar self yet had always been rooted in him, entangled in his every desire and thought and act, but mainly impotent and tranced, seemed now fully awake, and intent on extricating himself stage by stage from that prolonged entanglement in merely human living. The spirit of Man in his last moment yearned for continued life, and grieved over his æons of drowsy grub-hood, his tormenting stagnation in the chrysalis, his moth-maturity, so full of promise and yet so marred and barren, and finally his pointless slaughter; but the other self within him, the pure spirit in him, regarded his tragedy and all his errors with detachment. He cried, 'Not I, not I, that half-awakened, still self-pitying, man-bound spirit! Too feebly and erringly he inspired and ruled his members. No! He was not I. But I, I, what is it that I am?'

The spirit of Man, in the instant of his annihilation, feared, and yet adored this newly awakened being within him, sprung seemingly from his own spiritual substance, yet alien, lofty, and freed in his annihilation.

Searching more closely his future memory of his end, the spirit of Man recalls with human horror the slaughter of all his members, and his own extinction. And with a surge of personal resentment he sees the strange other self, that was seemingly not himself at all, triumph and exult in his annihilation. But immediately, in the light of his own miraculous vision from the foothills of eternity, both downward into time and upward to eternity's high peak, horror and resentment fade. He views his end with grave acquiescence, even with exaltation. Though doomed to annihilation, he identifies himself with that alien survivor. For that which died in his dying, though it was his own dear self, was but the vessel, the shell, the husk of that which survived. This at least the spirit of Man knows well, through his moment of eternal vision.

For this he knows. In that far future moment of man's destruction he, the spirit of six worlds, vanished into oblivion, experiencing no further happenings at all. But that within him, which was not himself, yet in some dark way more than himself, woke to its true nature; and rediscovered itself to be the spirit not merely of Man's six worlds but of a host of worlds, scattered throughout many galaxies of stars. This ampler spirit had indeed all along been conscious in that many-worlded host. To him, in his voluminous and many-worlded life, that simple spirit of one planetary system, the lowly spirit of Man, had been no more than one theme of dream-like yearning and thinking which he performed, as it were, absent-mindedly, while his attention was engaged with loftier matters.

The great company of worlds which together supported this high spirit were great and small, young and old, sprinkled among the galaxies like a few seeds adrift in the vast air.

These worlds were of two orders. Many, like the six human worlds, were too lowly to enter into the single and lucid awareness of that great spirit. Blindly, unwittingly, they contributed their part in the conscious spirit of the whole, as cells and muscles and intestines contribute unwittingly to the mind of a man. But other worlds, more developed and lucid, were like the brain-cells that together are conscious as the man's individual mind. These more lucid worlds, though greatly diverse in idiosyncrasy, were all alike in that their peoples had reached to psychic powers impossible to men. By consciousness of their underlying psychical identity they kept in touch with one another across the intervening spatial void. For in the dimensions of the spirit no gulfs divided them. In the spirit they were consciously together, they were one. Thus their worlds were indeed the multiple brain of a cosmical spirit.

The concern of these awakened worlds (so it seems to the lowly spirit of Man) was almost wholly with the life of the spirit. But of the nature of the spirit's life on this high plane the lowly spirit of Man perforce knows almost nothing, since his mentality is of a lowlier order. This alone he knows: that the cosmical community

of worlds like all true spirit was intent on contemplation of all the sensuous and spiritual subtlety of the cosmos, and chiefly the subtle mutual awareness of personal beings of every order; intent also on creating through ever new forms of art and philosophy and personal intercourse, new modes of the spirit.

In this high common enterprise the lowly spirit of Man in his six worlds had, of course, no conscious part whatever. For the human moth had never dared to fly into that high psychic sphere where world-peoples are consciously one spirit. Man seemingly was too lowly a creature for such adventure. His function in the life of the whole was seemingly no more than to contribute unwittingly to the ground-tone or temper of the great cosmical spirit's life.

Or was his case more tragic? Perhaps Man was indeed potentially of the sort to playa conscious part in the whole's life, but maybe he was so crippled that he remained for ever impotent. Perhaps the six worlds were by nature fit to enter consciously into the cosmical spirit, but perhaps Man had been too grossly poisoned by some alien and hostile influence ever to fulfil his true destiny. The moth was indeed seemingly meant for flight, but its chronic disease had crippled it beyond recovery.

And if this is indeed, as seems most likely, the truth about the six human worlds, maybe it is the truth also about many other of the abortive worlds up and down the galaxies. So at least it appears to the spirit if Man, searching his future memory. For seemingly even the great singular spirit of the cosmical community of worlds was himself not wholly fulfilled. Seemingly he too was frustrated, crippled by the widespread disease that frustrated so many of his members.

The spirit of Man obscurely remembers futurely the great diversity of the many worlds and races of the cosmical community. Most were in a way man-like, but some were of strange inhuman physique and mentality, inhuman too in their modes of sensing and in their ways of life. Some indeed were so alien that the spirit of Man, now sunk back to his terrestrial status, recovers only an inarticulate feeling of them as beings incomprehensible to man; as when, on waking, we try to recapture a strange dream or nightmare, and can say of it only that no words can describe it, no human thought conceive it. But some worlds, glimpsed by the spirit of Man in a spate of shifting, fleeting, dream-like vision, he can at least in outline seize. Of these, some were strange spheres inhabited not by races of separate individuals at all but by a continuous vital tissue spread over the whole world's surface. Of the races of individuals, many were very alien to Man. Some few there were whose native element was ocean; some were winged creatures of the air who, by a strange tilt of fortune, had reached and surpassed the human range of insight.

It seems to the spirit of Man, however, that most worlds of the cosmic-al community were peopled by creatures man-like in general form. Planets of the

terrestrial type were the most kindly homes for life. Though previously the spirit of Man had remembered futurely his own future career continuously up to the moment of his annihilation, now, confronted in memory with a host of man-like worlds, he half doubts which of all these man-like races was in fact the race that he himself had possessed. Was he indeed the spirit I of those six worlds that their sun had devoured? Or was he, after all, one of those other man-like races, of better fortune, that had in the end become members of the cosmical community? Or perhaps he was one of the many that had never even emerged from the chrysalis; or one of those most unfortunate spirits whose members had learnt too soon to rifle the energies of the atom, before they had spiritually awakened to the right use of power. Many such dangerous adolescent races his vision now obscurely reveals. One at least wielded its destructive energy so murderously in internecine warfare that its world became an unpeopled desert. Some, using their power to remould their own biological nature before they knew what was truly to be desired, rendered themselves physically inviable, or simply insane. And not a few, ignorantly tampering with mighty forces, burst their planets into whiffs of asteroids.

The more the spirit of Man broods upon the host of worlds, the more he doubts as to which of the many glimpsed man-like races was indeed his own. Perhaps after all he had been resident in one of those few races that had moved forward from strength to strength till in due season they had learnt the art of exploring the whole cosmos by telephathy and clairvoyance; one of those who had in due season played a pioneering part in founding the cosmical community. He cannot tell. But most probably, yes, almost certainly, he must be indeed the spirit of those six lowly worlds, destroyed by fire.

2. LIFE AND DEATH OF THE COSMOS

The spirit of Man remembers that from his viewpoint on the foothills of eternity he saw the birth and the death and the whole life of the cosmos. He witnessed the first instant of cosmical time when the creative fiat of the supreme Other issued in a spaceless point of light, pregnant with all the energies of the future cosmos. But of the fiat itself and of its source, he knows nothing. For even in his eternal instant the peak was but a lofty whiteness scarred with precipices, glimpsed fitfully beyond the high white clouds. But well he remembers how, from the inscrutable fiat, space I and time and all physical energy and finite spiritual potency gushed forth.

From that first moment of cosmical time the expanding gas-cloud swelled and swelled, and presently disintegrated into cloudlets. These in turn, whirling and flattening and trailing spiral streamers, crumbled into stars. And here and there, a flying whirlpool of primeval power collided with some star and tore from

its substance the material for future planets. And here and there among these new worlds sprang life; and here and there, spirit.

One by one the galaxies matured. More and more of the minded worlds made psychic contact with each other across the deserts of space; or rather they probed psychically down into their own nature till they reached their hidden unity of spirit. And in their diversity, and their underlying identity of spirit, the cosmical community grew ever richer in experience and more single in purpose. And in this singleness and richness awoke the spirit of this many galaxied universe, this cosmos. For the spirit of this cosmos was simply the identity of experience and of will presiding in all this rich diversity; and it precariously commanded allegiance through all conflict. Again and again there was bitter inter-mundane strife in which the weapons were not physical but psychical. The antagonists, separated by impassable tracts of space, could none the less destroy each other's minds by direct psychic impact of mind on mind, or disintegrate one another's hard-won community by subtle dissemination of psychic poison among the minds of the enemy world. The causes of this cosmical strife lay always in discord about the way in which the community of worlds could best fulfil its destiny as the vessel of spirit. These wars were all religious wars. The casualties were worlds poisoned beyond recovery, derelicts of spirit.

It seems to the lowly spirit of Man, recalling his high vision, that although again and again such conflicts tortured the cosmical community, and though many a noble world was lost by sheer misadventure, yet as the æons passed the cosmical community gained concord and strength. Its member worlds became more and more intent upon their common purpose. And this common purpose, so it seems to the lowly spirit of Man, was the will that every individual life in all those diverse worlds should be a theme of rich and true experience and of spiritual creating; and that each individual should be knit inwardly by sensitive love into the lives of some few diverse others, and by far-flung threads of comradeship into the whole life of his world, and of the cosmical community; and that the cosmical spirit should preside unquestioned in every mind, and be the single experience of the whole cosmical community, fulfilled in knowledge and in love.

But the life of the cosmos could not last for ever. Even as each minded world, each man and woman, each little fly and moth, must in its season die, so also must the great spirit of a cosmos.

Already the myriad beings of the cosmos foresaw the cosmical death. The physical energies of the cosmos were constantly dissipated. Star after star was extinguished, like a spark drifting on the wind. World after world was compelled to maintain its heat and life artificially by the disintegration of the atoms of its planet's rock. Race after race was forced to refashion itself eugenically for life not on a planet but on the cooled surface of its former sun. After æons beyond compu-

tation, the cosmos became a dark waste with here and there a few sparks of artificial light, where the races of intelligent beings still struggled to keep alive, and to maintain the cosmical spirit in full lucidity until the end. The dying community of the cosmos, indeed, now planned its fading life for one unshakable purpose. So long as the races could still maintain the cosmical spirit in full lucidity they would live on, to gain for the spirit the last possible wealth of experience. But when at last they were faced with inevitable degeneration, then one by one the races would destroy themselves. For it was the constant will of the cosmical beings that the cosmical spirit should die not inch by inch but in full lucidity. Ever since the first intelligences in the first of all the worlds had first become vessels of the cosmical spirit, they had also yearned with fear and adoration toward the dark Other, the cosmical spirit's alleged creator. But not till the cosmical spirit should be fully grown in beauty and in wisdom and in the power to love, could he (or she, for all spirits of composite growth must needs be hermaphrodite) be ripe to know the Other.

In the last days of the cosmos, the spirit of the cosmos longed impatiently to meet her unseen lover, knowing nothing of him but that she had great need of him. And she had strong faith that he too needed her. But the issue of her death was not to be as she had expected.

3. THE SPIRIT AND THE OTHER

To the spirit of Man upon the foothills of eternity it seemed that, long before this physical cosmos had sunk into the death of ultimate darkness and cold and stillness, the cosmical spirit died utterly; but that in her annihilation the essence in her, which was indeed the single and essential and universal Spirit, survived; and that the Spirit disentangled itself (or himself or herself) from the dying idiosyncrasy of this cosmos, and came into her own as indeed the very Spirit, identical in all the innumerable spheres of created being, of which our cosmos is but one.

Of those alien spheres of created being the spirit of Man, searching his brief vision of eternity, recovers nothing but the vague conviction that such alien spheres did indeed exist, and that to beings nurtured in this cosmos they must be for ever inconceivable. He knows merely that they are wholly disconnected with this cosmos, save in the experience of the Spirit which is identical in them all; and that in each one of them, as in this cosmos, the Spirit strives constantly to wake into Wisdom and love and universal community and further creating.

Obscurely it appears to the lowly spirit of Man, recalling his vision of eternity, that the spirit of each cosmos, at some moment of its cosmical time, dies; and that the single and universal Spirit, disentangling herself from all these deaths, preserves in her own singular awareness the whole treasure of experience con-

ceived in each cosmos.

Obscurely it appears to him that the universal Spirit, beautiful with all the beauty of every cosmos, yearns for communion with the dark Other, her creator. For in this union of the creature and the creator love surely is fulfilled.

But the lowly spirit of Man, peering from eternity's foothills, sees only that the universal Spirit, fulfilled with the beauty of all spheres of created being, dies, and, whether in that ultimate death she, like all lesser spirits, is annihilated so that a loftier spirit may strike free; or whether, dying, she swoons into blissful union with her creator; or whether, even for her, the dark Other remains utterly inscrutable and inaccessible, the lowly spirit of Man cannot know.

4. SIXTH INTERLUDE: THE BROKEN TOY

When the dearest, friendliest toy was broken, and the desperate child ran to you weeping, your whole will was to console. Let the world wait, the telephone ring unanswered, the train be missed. Nothing, sublunary or celestial, must come between you and the soothing of this grief. With kisses, hugs, exhortations for courage, and slyly intruding jokes, oh soften the tragedy, and rouse at last a wan, reluctant, ludicrous, watery smile!

Or perhaps you would say, 'Let's see if Daddy can mend poor Jumbo'. Then I, feebly rebellious, but mastered by the urgency in tearful eyes, and the sight of your tenderness, would set about clumsy surgery, so that Jumbo might return to the loving arms, patched, maimed or squinting, but more or less himself.

This passion of tenderness, which blazed in the child for the toy, in you for the child, sprang (so my heart confidently affirmed) from the heart of the cosmos.

But the perennial slaughter of the innocents? And Hitler's gospel? And the stern law of entropy?

The comforted child beamed on mended Jumbo, and you on the child.

Chapter 7 SALVATION

1. THE SPIRIT OF MAN GRIEVES FOR MEN

The Spirit of Man is daunted by his station on the middle heights of the great hierarchy of being. Above him rise range upon range of spirits, up to the universal Spirit; and beyond, even beyond the very Spirit whose essence is intelligence and love and gallant creating, towers the veiled, the inconceivable Other.

The spirit of Man is daunted by the knowledge that he himself, like men and women, must in due season die. And yet, contemplating his death, he finds full peace in the expectation that his life must give some slight enrichment to loftier beings than himself, and finally to the very Spirit.

But then, looking downward upon the myriad little individuals alive or dead,

on earth and on the host of worlds, he sees that very few of them are capable of that peace; so fettered is each one to his own individuality, fearing extinction as a child the dark. Compassion stabs the spirit of Man on account of the littleness, the helplessness, the cruel frustration and torment, of the swarms of these minute abortively personal beings.

Hot protest surges suddenly in him against the Other, who seemingly permits this misery.

But then, remembering the glimpsed high peak of being, the cold, the fair, the dread, he whispers in his own heart, 'Thou! Oh, Thou! Your little short-lived creature scorns to judge you. And yet—could I but see, but feel, your will's rightness! But Thou! Were I to condemn, yet must I adore.'

And now a thought dawns on his mind's darkness, a thought about his own experienced salvation, and so about the salvation of all spirits. 'There is nothing positive,' he says, 'nothing essential in me at all save the universal Spirit herself, deprived in me of all her nature but the little part that can find expression within the cramping limits of humanity. In my dying she, who is more I than I myself, strikes free. And in her freeing I (so says my recent vision) find completeness. What dies in my death, dies utterly; but what survives is utterly fulfilled in the untrammelled Spirit. And further, in that vision of my future death, did I not see myself in death's instant re-live my whole terrestrial life, watching it with new eyes from the high foothills of eternity? Did I not see my sorrows and my shames, my errors and my hounding remorse, all transfigured, all duly placed as features within the grave and lovely pattern of the cosmos. And if this is so for me, is it not so also for all the lesser spirits, even to men and women, even to dogs and lizards, trees and moulds and the disease bacteria; even to the ultimate sparks of spirit within each atom? When death annihilates them, the spirit in them strikes free and climbs the heights of being, to waken fully as the universal Spirit. And will not she, each time this happens, she whose very essence is love, lovingly look back upon those little lives, and in compassion re-create those little spirits for a while within her vastness, so that each may see its little life transfigured in the pattern of eternity. And then will not each little recreated spirit, having found this fulness and salvation, gladly sleep again for ever? In each of them what utterly dies is his separateness and his blindness. If this is "he", then "he" is indeed destroyed; but if "he" is that alien who wakes in his dying, then "he" it is who rises to the very foothills of eternity, and sees his little earthly life transfigured.'.

Surmising in this way about the lowlier spirits, the spirit of Man recovers peace of mind. For if this thought be true all, even to the least, find a salvation more blissful than any that any of them could have the wit to conceive.

But now the spirit of Man finds his new peace still precarious. For once more he remembers the dread, though worship-compelling, Other. And once more

doubting, he fears once more for the salvation of his fellow spirits; so uncaring seems the Other, so unresponsive, so heartless. Yet, fearing, the spirit of Man still adores. For the very Spirit herself, in her extremity of death and loneliness, still adores. 'And so', he cries, 'must all the lesser spirits too, when they are re-created within the very Spirit. Their salvation is assured.'

The spirit of Man's mood changes. Brooding on the terrestrial lives of men and women and their ineluctable moulding by brute circumstance and blind historical forces, he loses all sense of the Other. The strange intoxication leaves him. And at last he complains, 'The Other? What Other is there but the blind idiot, Fate, or the quite unworshipful outer darkness, the thoughtless void?'

His fog-bound mind stands paralysed.

But once more his mood changes. 'At least,' he cries, 'if the Other is a mere projection of my own desire and fear, still there is the Spirit, the indubitable Spirit; in me, and men, and all the worlds. And to the Spirit I shall be loyal without reserve.'

The spirit of Man prays to the very Spirit, 'Possess me wholly! Let me be the filled vessel, the perfected instrument! Give me the heart, the wit, the imagination, to serve effectively in your cosmical war against the darkness, and the void, and idiot Fate!'

But no sooner has he prayed, than, seemingly in unlooked-for answer to his prayer, he is seized again by the irresistible presence of the Other; so that he can only whisper, 'Thou! Oh, Thou!'

2. THE REAR-GUNNER, AND OTHERS

The spirit of Man, brooding still on his vision, conceives how each of the lowly spirits might be re-created in the vastness of the Spirit; for it still seems to him that the infinite tenderness of the universal Spirit toward every kind of personal being must impel her to this high act of love, this reawakening of all lesser finite spirits to receive salvation and then the ultimate bliss of sleep.

The rear-gunner of that aircraft in which a moth had fluttered, must surely have found salvation. He who had been destroyed with all that crew, he who had died and wakened to be the crew's spirit, and then the spirit of the killed in a certain battle, and then the spirit of Man, and then of this whole cosmos, and then at last the very Spirit herself, yearning toward the Other, even he found salvation. And the salvation that he found was not merely the vicarious salvation of dying that nobler spirit might in his death strike free. For out of the charity of the universal Spirit the minute annihilated spirit of the rear-gunner was re-formed for a while within the vastness of the universal Spirit.

The rear-gunner reverted to his little earthly life and death, but with confused knowledge of the past and future of mankind, and of a host of worlds, and of

eternity's foothills, and of the glimpsed high peak of being.

'When I was imprisoned', he mused, 'in that aircraft, and in the somnolent nature of that boy, how dark and cheerless was my prison! Peering through the bars, I saw nothing but man's harshness and the indifferent stars. How forlornly, over the narrow sea, I strained for courage! When the moth touched me to longing and self-pity, how near I was to breaking! And how fantastic, ludicrous, and how phantasmal, was that whole little universe that I had spun round myself, cocoon-wise, conceiving it to be no fiction but the huge and harsh reality! Yes, and my poor muddled, self-bound attempt at loving, so blind, so desperately astray from love's true course! But now at last I have lived, and truly loved. I have loved beauty in a host of worlds. Even on little Earth I have loved so much, and in a thousand veins. I have loved Helen and Cleopatra, and others as lovely and more lovable. I have praised with Dante his Beatrice. And I have fully known what in my lifetime was denied me utterly, the marriage of true minds, and a lifetime's deepening harmony. Yes, and I have listened to Socrates in Athens, and comprehended fully the wisdom of Gautama. I have walked with Jesus in the cornfields. And though now, once more limited by my human littleness, I can but vaguely conceive the glories that I have experienced, yet I know that I have indeed delighted in all terrestrial and all cosmical beauty, all human and all cosmical goodness. I have weighed all such thought as lies within the range of any finite spirit. Wakened far beyond the dim lucidity of Man, I have admired the high social beauty of the Cosmical Republic, and served it in the gallant lives of its many citizens. And in the death of the cosmos I have wakened as the universal Spirit. And then I, the very Spirit, looking back with compassion at me, the martyred boy, have re-created him that he may find salvation. And I, the boy, have seen my little irksome and meaningless earthly life woven into the glorious pattern of cosmical being; and there transfigured. But also, as the universal Spirit, I have fluttered papery wings against the shut window of the ultimate prison, vainly yearning toward the Other. I have participated in the Spirit's death. Beyond that, all is darkness, not of desolation, surely, but of mystery. And now I, who was a boy killed in battle, am reconciled to that frustration of my earthly self, and even to the Spirit's ultimate death. Little I, dying into the greatest I, have found salvation. And now I, that boy, desire for my little self nothing but sleep, dissolution in the vastness of the Spirit. And I, the very Spirit, though I too must die, and shall not within the whole span of time find union with the Other, have found salvation. For my beauty will be perfected for him, to take or to destroy.'

Thus the rear-gunner, who was killed in company with his six companions and with a moth, found his salvation. And then in peace he sank into eternal sleep.

The revolutionary engineer of that aircraft crew also had his reawakening. 'When I was imprisoned', he said, 'in that eager boy, I really believed that the millenium was at hand, and that it would be won by such as I, and that it would be

simply a world-wide Terrestrial Soviet Republic. But now, after how many stages of my post-mortal growth and grim remaking, I know better. How often have I been forced to watch the Revolution thwarted, even on the Earth! And in the end I have seen its long-belated triumph on that planet turn stale and lethal through sheer stagnation. I have seen the same in world after world. But also I have watched the founding of the great Cosmical Republic, and its glory, and its final death. On Earth and in a swarm of worlds I have entered into the many ways of life which that boy could not conceive, or which he noted only to condemn them as irrelevant to the Revolution. I have gauged all the subtle flavours of personality, human and non-human. I have been remade by the great arts, and by careful philosophy. I who was that boy was very ruthless, very blind; but I did, according to my dim light, see and serve mankind's immediate need. And now, I who was so restless have found peace. I who was so hot a champion of man's fulfilment, and even (all unwittingly) of the Spirit's triumph, I, who was so fierce a rebel against the power of tyrants, have accepted man's frustration and the Spirit's ultimate death at the hands seemingly of the tyrant Other. Strange that I, who so cherished man and scorned religion, should now worship not only the universal Spirit but the tyrant Other; who, if he exists, is seemingly indifferent to our prayers and to our worship. Perhaps he is no more than a figment of our craving. Then, at least how glorious a craving! But the Spirit is no figment. And in the Spirit I, who was once a rash boy, but have travelled so far and learnt so much, have seen my little earthly life transfigured. And now, all my desire for this poor human self is sleep, dissolution in the Spirit. And what if she too in her death must be dissolved in sleep before the mighty Other will take her?'

Thereupon, the re-created spirit of that boy slept.

The saint in a war-tortured city woke again within the vastness of the Spirit. 'How very strange,' she mused, 'how surprisingly different from my expectation has death been, and how much more wonderful! At first it seemed that I was lifted straight to full communion with thy God, such bliss enfolded me. It was no merely private bliss; for I felt that in this heaven all my friends were equally included, my neighbour the plumber who was so good to me, the pale mother whose boy was killed (but in that heaven she found him), the Jew I saved from the police, the prostitute who nursed me through my sickness, all these and all other good-hearted people shared, it seemed, that bliss. Yes, and all sinners too, it seemed, were remade and brought into that heaven. But I did not long remain in static ecstasy. Things were happening round me, things never dreamed of in my simple faith. The gulfs of history opened before me, and the future, and all the hosts of living worlds, and the incredible diversity of spirit in them all. And most strangely the God who had gathered me to himself, who had wakened me to his vastness and perfection, who was indeed the universal Spirit in us all, seemed most perplexingly to be after all a finite, a created spirit. And beyond him loomed that dread Other,

whom in all my earthly days I had feared; and so denied, affirming always that the very Creator himself was love, and that beyond him there was nothing. But now my own past longing for my God of love was transformed into the yearning of the universal Spirit for that Other, the dread, the hidden, the frosty-fair, the source and crown of all things. Him, whether he be love or wholly inconceivable, I needs must worship. The Spirit, his creature, grows in loveliness, and prepares herself to be his bride. Yet he remains ever unseen and unresponsive. At last she dies. And then? Does he perhaps destroy the perfected creature that he has killed; or does she wake into eternity, and in his unveiled presence; and in joy of mutual love are they two made one? However stem her fate, she gladly welcomes it, because he wills it. And so she has salvation. And I too, who am at once she and this little earthly self re-created in her vastness, have salvation. Seeing my little life transfigured, I crave nothing now but sleep. And she too, the very Spirit, whether her fate be slow death and then absolute sleep or inconceivable eternal life, has peace.'

And so the saint who died in the tormented City slept.

There also died the false prophet of the fallen empire. In the instant of his death, as in all deaths, the little mundane self was confronted with a newly awakened, alien self, who now scrutinized and weighed the dark and blood-stained rosary of his life's days. 'Not I,' he cried, 'it could not have been I, who poisoned the minds of millions with false reasoning, and their hearts with false values. Not I glorified might and cruelty and lying. And oh, it was not I but some devil in me that tortured so many sensitive creatures in my rage for power.' But the mundane self of the false prophet, in the instant of his annihilation, protested, 'It was in loathing of their canting gentleness that I praised might and cruelty, and in hate of their canting truth that I praised falsehood. And it was on a people who craved my discipline and my inspiration that I imposed my will. I was the high instrument of fate. But in the end fate betrayed me.' The false prophet's new and alien self replied, 'An instrument of fate, but no less a traitor to the Spirit, which in my youth I vaguely knew, like all men. Then stage by stage, and wilfully, I misconceived it, until at last I gloried in the part of Antichrist. I played with men's fears and hates and bloodlust, till in the end fate, far from betraying me, did indeed deal justly with me. But "me", "I"? Surely that evil pervert was not I. For I am pledged wholly to the Spirit. And though for that creature's sins I must pay, perhaps in an eternity of torment, yet I praise whole-heartedly, ungrudgingly, the Spirit.'

The being that had awakened in the false prophet's death had much to learn; for, though his will was clean, he was still deeply entangled in the ignorance and falsehood and false values of his earthly self. But after his agony of remorse had spent itself, and after many torturing stages of remaking under the stem pressure of the new-learnt truth about mankind, he woke at last, as all men wake, to find himself the very spirit of Man, and then the cosmical spirit, and finally the univer-

sal Spirit herself, yearning toward the Other.

But presently, within the vastness of the Spirit the little earthly self of the false prophet was re-created for a while. Wise with the Spirit's wisdom, he looked down on his little earthly life, and sighed. 'I did great evil,' he mused, 'epoch-making evil. Of my own will I wickedly did it. The currents of that little world's events fatally combined with my own weak vision and self-importance and frustration to drag me down into that life of horror. But now, having indeed suffered my purgatory, I am remade. And now I see my little hateful self no longer hateful, but transfigured. The agony of shame and guilt is passed. Now, looking back, I would not change that life. I would not have it otherwise. My evil, though in me utterly evil, was a needed feature of the whole's form. Someone had to play that part. And so I, even I, who was so wicked, find salvation. And now, what more can I desire for my earthly self but sleep?'

The spirit of Man, contemplating such possibilities of individual salvation, reminds himself that these thoughts are his own mind's figments. 'Can they', he wonders, 'be indeed veridical, or are they sheer fantasy? And if they are true, is not all well with the world?' Listening in the depth of his own being, he strains for some clear answer. No answer comes but silence. And for his own part he knows that he has outgrown the need for any such consolation. Strange peace possesses him. He whispers in his own being's depth, 'Oh, Thou, Thou! So be it!'.

3. SEVENTH INTERLUDE: GROWING OLD IN SPRINGTIME

Larks are singing their way up airy ladders, peewits rapturously tumbling down them. The gorse is gay. Our rhubarb, lusty and rude, spreads great palms to grab the light. Young potato-shoots sketchily rule dotted lines across the beds. Your early peas are shoving their little green noses up through the earth; and in the frame your cabbage seedlings, in huddled queues, await their turn for ampler and more dangerous living. On the hawthorn's sheltered side a foam of blossom is spreading. In the field an immense concourse of oat-seedlings, a mighty youth-movement, uniformed in green, hales the sun with up- stretched arms.

Spring is painting the earth's old face young again, is actually rejuvenating her.

Even we, the ageing gardeners, are sun-warmed with an illusion of youthfulness. When the cuckoo calls, we pause for a moment in our weeding, our digging; to listen, and exchange smiles. But our backs are stiff with stooping, our muscles too quickly tire. Old eyes, unaided, can scarcely tell a chaffinch from a linnet.

We too, once upon a time, were part of the spring. But now our season is autumn. There will come an April when we shall be as out of place as a pile of last year's potato haulms that no one has had time to burn.

Growing old is of course tiresome,' yet in a way illuminating. Though the body's ecstasies begin to fade, yet somehow they have an added, a strange and solemn significance, like holy rites long practised yet ever fresh. The mind too is ageing. Already, though as yet almost imperceptibly, it begins to lose its grip. Memories will not promptly come when called. Or they crowd in unwanted, confusing thought. Exasperation is too easily roused. Danger, pain, and all harsh change of circumstance become more daunting, because the strength to cope with them is hard to summon. Youth's gift of sudden and reshaping insight comes no more. And the future, unless by accident or design my life is cut short, will bring sheer dotage. Strange, how little it disturbs me that I, who am interested most in man and the cosmos, shall fall away from the adult mentality and lapse into the second childhood! The high themes will be too much for me. I shall finger my memories in public and repeat my anecdotes. (And you, who are the younger, with what patience and gentleness you will correct me!) A little later my feeble craving will be only for warmth and sleep and such food as I can digest. And then I shall be a burden; to myself, to you, and to the young. It is no sunny prospect. Yet, seen in its whole setting, it becomes an acceptable though a sombre detail.

And short of dotage, life's autumn has its own glory, unconceived in youth. Young, I was a mere bubble of ego, and the universe was no more than a close filmy skin containing me; old, I am reduced almost to a point, but a sentient point, upon which a vast reality, depth beyond depth, is focussed. In a way I am at once dimensionless yet also infinite. I am almost nothing, yet I include a panoramic aspect of the infinity beyond me. The view is, of course, fragmentary, and must be largely false; but it presents itself to me as a subtle, a far-flung, a dread but lovely universe.

The dying fires of my body, and the cravings of this withering ego, seem now so unimportant, so dwarfed by the urgent needs of a whole tumultuous human world, and by the imagined potentiality of the myriad stars, and the unseen yet ever darkly fu present majesty beyond the heavens. The failing body still clings to life, still clamours for such delights as it can still achieve. And all too often I still sucumb to its unruly greeds or fears, false to the outer reality and the central spirit that possesses me. The withering self still craves security, immortality, and even the trappings of dignity; but shamefacedly, with self-ridicule. Though all too often I conduct myself slavishly, I am no longer enslaved. Increasingly I identify myself not with those cravings but with the great outer reality and the central spirit. When the body dies, and I myself, may be, sink into eternal sleep, I shall have lost so little. For the cosmos will go on; and the spirit, in innumerable other centres, will go on. In losing this infinitesimal 'me', I lose, after all, nothing.

Further, in ageing, in this slow withering away of cherished delights and vaunted powers, there is a kind of purgation, as though in readiness for some grave impending event. The victim is being shorn and cleansed in preparation

for the altar. But the universal spirit that inwardly possessed him is now slowly discarding the idiosyncrasies of this outworn individual, is now stretching long-cramped wings, impatient for flight.

Those dear delights, those modest powers, all that is the cherished me, I willingly let go. Others will repeat them, and some more splendidly. For me, when this tiresome ageing is fulfilled, the welcome end is sleep.

But you? But we? The fair thing that has awakened in us, must that too sleep for ever? Or does it, since its essence is of the spirit, strike free?

Chapter 8 HERE AND NOW

THE vision which the spirit of Man has laboured to recapture fades even from memory. Bells and trumpets conquer it under their loud cataract. Nothing more is to be recovered of the reality that faced the spirit of Man in his instant of eternity.

Reality? Was it indeed reality or a dream, a figment of his own sickness?

Strange that the whole vast panorama of time and of eternity, recently so actual, should now have paled into the mere memory of a dispelled hallucination! Like a snowflake dropped in water, it has melted, vanished. The warm present has dissolved it. Vainly now the spirit of Man thrusts his sight against the fog-wall. He cannot pierce it. Eternity is once more infinitely remote; and inconceivable, just an empty word. The vista of the future æons is mere fantasy. Even tomorrow, lying one little pace ahead, lies hidden.

Yielding to the present's insistent clamour, the spirit of Man observes today's mankind. Can men, he wonders, rise beyond themselves in this great moment? Oh that they may falsify the recent tragic vision, and at one bound cross the Rubicon that has so long restrained them! But are they the stuff for such a venture? Has their recent world-wide agony strengthened or weakened them? Has suffering purged or broken them? Will the moth now burst its chrysalis bonds, or is it poisoned at last fatally?

The spirit of Man perceives that the swarms of men are in unison at least in their will for peace, for a long respite from war's strain and horror; but lust for vengeance and fear of retribution force them into sharp discordancy; and equally the will for power and glory opposes itself to the passion to end all tyranny. And if men crave peace, it is less for love's sake than for fear's. Over the prostrate enemy the victors grasp comradely hands; but gauge each other with a wary eye. In all the celebrant cities the crowds are drunk with music and with impatient hope; but here and there a sober and a silent watcher is chilled with doubt.

Recently the conquered peoples, freed one by one, had blessed their liberators with flowers and wine and kisses; then, one by one disillusioned, they had cooled, or even turned futile arms against their new conquerors. For these vic-

tors, intent on order, on repairing the world's crushed tissues, had not been tender to the unruly germs of the new world-creature, whose strange, unlovely, foetal shape repels all those who cannot read its promise. Order, the victors conceived too simply, in an outworn pattern. Their touch, blindly healing, had favoured not the moth's unfinished shaping but the dissolute organs of the grub; not the new, the wakening Man, but the old sleep-walker.

So it seems to the anxious spirit of Man, watching through his many eyes his own tortured flesh. Wherever war has passed, and where the tyrant armies have withdrawn from their untenable conquests, and ebbed back towards their central stronghome, desolation lies in the wake of the retreating flood. Fields are barren; for the young men were taken away to be work-slaves in the enemy lands. Villages, if not wrecked and burned for vengeance, are starving, their food-stores rifled. Cities are crippled or utterly destroyed, their machinery smashed or stolen. And everywhere the human creatures, harshly moulded by years of warfare or years of oppression or years of vain though supremely brave secret resistance to the foreign tyrant, are now too familiar with harshness, are unserene, are tinder to every spark. Marred by hunger, by uncared-for sickness, by respiteless fear or sudden terror, by impotent hate or outraged love, they are gaunt and deadly tired; are listless, and yet quick to puerile or senile passion, whether of friendliness or loathing, impulsive gratitude or spite. Too long one sole crude need has grimly ruled these conquered; ruled all of them save the heroic resisters; the need not for God, or the soul's salvation, nor for mankind's liberation, nor even for the rescue of their country, but just for food and clothing, a bare pittance, endlessly sought and never adequate. For this, and for avoidance of the conqueror's harshness, they have daily schemed and ventured. Strange that, in spite of all, some had found time and strength to work for a happier future, to fan courage and hope through secret newspapers and radio, and with the example of their own heroism.

But later, when the foul tide had ebbed, and the first liberations had been celebrated, still the martyred and bewildered peoples starved. For the unfinished war still claimed the ships, the trains, the lorries. And because of their continued misery, and because the men of money were seen to be creeping back into power, some bitter voices affirmed that liberation had proved a mockery. And then, because these unhappy peoples were all overwrought with suffering, they snatched up once more guerrilla weapons, and so provoked their liberator-conquerors to harshness.

What new mentality, the spirit of Man wonders, what new temper, savage, and maddened by suffering, or perhaps by very suffering purged and kindled to ruthless, piercing insight, will presently blaze from this tormented continent?

The plight of the liberated, though severe, is more easily to be borne than

the ruin of the defeated enemy. For not only have they suffered war's extreme ravage but also the curse of all their victims is upon them. Yet, by nature not inhuman, they have bowels and brains as prone to gentleness as any other people's, and no more prone to devilry. Un-toward circumstance has savaged them, as a horse by brutal treatment is turned vicious. And so this proud perverted nation, too faithful to their false prophet, must now suffer for the evil that they did in the prophet's name. For now the newly liberated peoples are hot for vengeance. Hateful vengeance, masquerading as justice or security, demands its due. Kill! Kill the war-criminals, who founded the concentration camps, who tore off finger-nails, who beat sensitive flesh to pulp or slowly burnt it, who cut off women's breasts and crushed men's testicles, who tortured children before the eyes of their parents, to force betrayal. At last they shall pay in their own suffering, even to the least of petty officials who carried out the commanded brutality. And for the masses, if it is not practicable or politic to slaughter all those millions, at least their war power must be utterly and for ever destroyed. Seize or smash their vast machinery, seal up their mines, divide their land among the victors, brand them all as criminals, use the skilled and unskilled workers all as slaves to make good the huge damage in all the lands that they overran! Twice in a generation their barbaric power-lust brought the world to war. Now at last the penalty! Already the slow lava-flood of conquest has seared their fields, trampled their villages and cities, devoured their young men and women. And now, from the east westwards, and from the west eastwards, fleeing populations have poured into the constricted heart of their country, like beasts before a forest fire.

Their armies were pushed back until all resistance broke. Today the victors meet.

Today, while in all other lands the bells rejoice, in one ruined metropolis they are silent. And silent crowds line the streets, watching the armed procession of invaders, and awaiting retribution. But some eagerly cheer. Formerly secret resisters to the fallen tyranny, now at last they are freely vocal. Others, changing their allegiance with the change of wind, give tongue in loud false welcomes.

The spirit of Man, peering through the sombre minds of those defeated citizens, reviews their plight with horror and with pity. He blames them, of course, for their past betrayal of the Spirit; as he blames all men, and blames himself, for inveterate frailty and perversity. But he knows, what the victors fear to recognize, that a great part of this distracted people secretly loathed and condemned the prophet and his tyranny, but dared not speak against it, since to murmur was to court inhuman punishment. He knows too that thousands were not deterred even by this threat. They accepted harsh imprisonment, disease, torture, mental ruin and finally slaughter, rather than keep silent. These he salutes as the noblest of his members. And this whole tragic people he now chiefly pities for their desolation, and for the vengeance that the indignant, the short-sighted victors prepare

for them.

During the final agony of the city's resistance, government broke down, order vanished. The city's population, formerly so disciplined, became a rabble of desperate and lawless individualists. But no! For even in this chaos friends could still be loyal to friends, mothers were still faithful to their children, lovers to one another. In their extremity these citizens manifested not only their worst but also their best. Here and there, after long oblivion, they rediscovered their best. For they were human. And what extremity, what unsurpassed calamity was theirs! Their honeycomb of dwellings all trodden down, they sheltered in the wreckage, defending their chosen crannies against the swarming homeless creatures from east and west; and from the escaped slaves, imported toilers from the conquered lands, now breaking free, and waging their own private savage war of vengeance against the citizens. Famished prowlers attacked each other for scraps of food, or banded themselves together to storm the stores, overpowering the police. The sick and the dying lay untended among the ruins. For the emaciated bodies of these once proud citizens could not resist the plagues that swept through the city; and the dead were too many to be removed.

But now at last the war is over. The sirens cry no more. Overhead ten thousand aircraft of the victors circle and stream, displaying power.

With horror and foreboding the spirit of Man searches the minds of these distressful citizens, and their compatriots up and down that ruined land. What part will they play in the new world, a world balanced on the knife-edge between hope and despair, a world in which the neurotic mentality will be tinder for every spark of discord? The elder and the gentler citizens, who for so long dared not even whisper their yearning for a long-lost and happier city and a kindlier nation, now openly praise those times; though they themselves by acquiescence had helped to murder the old order and install the new and evil state. But the young? They had no part in that happier age. They never breathed the faith which for their forefathers was the very air of life. From childhood their minds were trained and twisted to the new, diabolic faith. And though many of them are now sickened of savagery, they are ignorant of the spirit. Bewildered, they wake at last from the nightmare illusion into which they were born, and that they could not but take for reality. And now, in a new, strange daylight world, they dare not move. They have no bearings in it. Like a blind man given sight, they are merely confused and paralysed by their new perception. Some are enticed by it to grope furtively, uncomprehendingly and with many a tumble, along the way of gentleness that they have been so thoroughly schooled to scorn. For these there is hope. But others, too deeply addicted to the drugs of hate and violence, too jealously resentful towards all friendly, happier beings, too fiercely at war with their own gentler nature, remain incurably the crazy heroes or perverted saints or mere hooligans that harsh circumstance has made them. Bitter and incredulous at their leader's

fall and their fatherland's catastrophe, they swear vengeance, dedicating themselves to the next war, and to the enslavement of all mankind.

Feeling inwardly the perverted heroism of these lost souls, the spirit of Man shudders. Theirs are the same bowels and brains as other men's. Once they were little hopeful children, little straight green shoots of true humanity. But the poisoned blizzard seared and twisted them. Counting the host of them, the spirit of Man despairs. For the victors plan vengeance; and vengeance breeds contrary vengeance; and where vengeance rules men's minds, perverts and hooligans are very acceptable as instruments, and as leaders.

But the conquered are only one people among many. The spirit of Man turns his grave scrutiny upon the conquerors, those marching men, weathered, apt for hardihood, and for slaughter, with bullet or shell, with bayonet or hand-grenade or knife. He considers, too, those many boys in the upper air, those pilots, gunners and the rest, machine-trapped all of them, yet for the crew's sake self-disciplined and comradely. He feels in the hearts of all these invaders a deep, crushed-down horror of warfare, and a longing for the ways of peace. In all of them he finds the unclear but urgent need for some gentler and more deeply rooted 'we' than the stem comradeship of war-time crew or company. And with this need for gentleness arises a vague tenderness towards all men, even towards the conquered. For though at one moment these conquerors profess stem retribution, in the next they may be sharing their rations with a hungry citizen. In all of them the lust for vengeance is strongly countered by a blindfold, urgent, desperate movement towards the spirit; the very movement that so bewilderingly stirs the war-racked citizens themselves.

Is this, then, inquires the spirit of Man with sudden hope, the new world's new temper?

But now he turns from the victorious invaders in the city's streets and sky to watch the homelands of these conquerors. There too smoulders the same longing; but how confused, how seamed with fears and greeds and a thousand plain stupidities.

In the west, believers in money scheme to save mankind by their money-power; sincerely, for their hearts are touched by mankind's distress. But their own too-well-remembered triumphs of free commerce, and their sly hope of further gain, blind them to the world's new needs, to its need of a supreme world-purpose and world-plan, and its need that all men should feel themselves one in the spirit. These believers in money propose to create, by sheer free commerce, prosperity for all men, and for themselves dominance and vast riches; forgetting the harsh lesson of the planless past. And the spirit? Even those whose minds are not bemused by money conceive the spirit far too simply, in the t form that money fostered. For them the individual, who is the seat of money-power and the pio-

neer of all great enterprise, is also the sole vessel of the spirit. And this is true, but not the whole truth. Nowhere but in the awareness, the wisdom, the loving, the creative action, of individuals can the spirit be; but these self-confident individualists dare not see that the brigand individual, who would be self-complete and unrestrained, is the spirit's main enemy. We are members one of another.

The spirit of Man turns eastward to the great new society where money-power has been tamed, where men have planned resolutely, ruthlessly, for the common welfare. But here too the upshot is uncertain. Here, as elsewhere, bums the will for the spirit, though unacknowledged and unnamed. But here they conceive it as social discipline and social power, the power of the first great comradely community to develop all its potency for the fulfilling of its citizens in health and wealth, and in that pattern of mentality which the new state's masters and the hosts of their willing followers declare most admirable. For them the main theme is the ability for practical service and willing discipline in the common work. The spirit of Man knows well that this fellowship in work is a factor in the true spirit, and one disparaged in the west. But if this is not balanced by the west's loyalty to the individual's own perception of the spirit in his own heart-searching and solitariness, and in his own salutation of his own friend's uniqueness, the spirit must surely wither. With anxious doubt the spirit of Man watches this great people's crusading enthusiasm for their new order. He feels inwardly their impatience with un-believers, their will for conformity, their fiery, arrogant, ruthless loyalty to the new society. How well justified; but also how dangerous! Are they, after all, heading for a new tyranny, and for the world-wide ant-state? Or is their mass-mindedness a passing mood, caused by all their suffering and their common danger? And will this most socially conscious of all peoples become presently also the most spiritually aware? Will they, when the present stress is over, recover their heart-searching and their solitariness, to pursue with fresh earnestness and new penetration the questing, the mystical, vision of their own earlier sages?

And what of those other eastern peoples? What of those dark-skinned and still unfree dwellers in the great peninsula, 'whose sages were most mystical of all? And those more' easterly, with faces of old ivory, whose way of life is the most ancient; but today in the hard school of war they work out together a way most new, though deeply founded on the past? And what of the darkest peoples, who now uneasily stir in their long servitude?

With doubt but with hope the spirit of Man surveys the condition of his multiple flesh. The ferment is world-wide and deep. Surely the world-creature is straining to break the chrysalis bonds. The moth will soon be free, will spread wing and fly, will live its ardent life beyond the grub's farthest range of vision.

But the spirit of Man's own recent tragic vision of Man's future still daunts him.

But then, once more, beyond the stars and æons he darkly feels the Other, and in mystery finds peace.

1. END PIECE: PARENTHOOD

When first you saw your daughter, you said, 'It is all so strange! That new little thing seems quite unconnected with me.' But at the breast she quickly bound you, and soon your whole life was centred on her. Parted from her, you relaxed into coma. I became a background figure, noticed occasionally for refreshment.

When your son came, he of course occupied the focus; but he was no supplanter of his sister, and she no discarded fondling. You made room for both; and they, very soon, for each other.

Over their upbringing, how we planned and wondered! This food, should it be, or that? This routine, or that? This toy, this book, this parental attitude, this school, or that? Every move was a dangerous experiment, fostering growth or checking it, leaving perhaps a permanent scar. Dreadful the thought that we, through ignorance or unwitting failure of character, might be crippling those young spirits for a whole lifetime.

Suddenly death threatened our daughter. Twelve years she had grown from a microbe inside you, a mere parasite, to become a bright young human individual, hopefully learning with laughter and tears the high art of womanhood. But now, through sheer chance, death or madness might this very day destroy her. She suffered, we were helpless, the surgeon's knife alone could save her. We shall not forget that day. We shall not forget seeing her, when it was over, her head turbaned in band gages, so weak, so white, so unexpectedly beautiful; and still herself.

Soon, bewilderingly soon, the two were in turn done with schooling, and freed at last from our close care. Each now must try for a foothold in a crumbling, a catastrophic world. But then the war claimed both; her, for the embattled metropolis; him, for the sea. We shall not forget his going. With untried strength he set out to face the horror that the elders had made. When his ship was sunk, and he, among the few survivors, was taken from the water, no mystic message told us. And when at last we learned of it, we went about our affairs unchanged; but when we thought of him in the water, it was with bated breath. We were awed, and vaguely shamed, by our continued good fortune in a tormented world. Where millions are struck down, those who are spared shudder.

The two live on. They are no longer our children, but a young woman and a young man, formerly our children, now our junior fellow citizens, our loved and respected and perplexing friends. Much, of course, we have still in common with them; but the years prise us ever apart. In trivial ways, and perhaps sometimes more deeply, we may still and gladly help. We can write letters, send books and

fruit and pipes. We keep at least a home, for their rest and healing. But in the more fateful ventures of the spirit the two are beyond range of our helping. Formed in part by us, they are yet creatures of a world strange to us. Throughout their minds, your mothering and my fathering are a deep-written, an inerasable palimpsest; but over and over that archaic script truths not of our teaching, values not of our preaching, and maybe errors not ours, are strongly superscribed. And so, though for us the two are for ever our children, yet also they are strangers.

We peer anxiously into their futures. They make their alien choices, and we dread the issue for them; as the hen for her swimming foster-brood. Could we but teach them the skill for living as once we taught them skating, that they might as surely surpass us in life as on the ice! But for living in tomorrow's world what lore have we? Perhaps their alien choices are in fact sure and finished strokes in an art beyond us.

So it is with the world. With bated breath each generation fears for its successor. Yet the world goes on; belying equally the forebodings of the old and the hopes of the young, flowering ever with unforeseen disaster and with strange glory.